

S E R M O N S

ON

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

J O H N J O R T I N, D. D.

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C O N T E N T S.

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Agur's Request.

PROV. XXX. 7.

*Two things have I required of thee ; deny me them
not before I die. Remove far from me vanity
and lies ; give me neither poverty nor riches ;
feed me with food convenient for me : lest I be
full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord ?
or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of
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THE M. O. N. X. V. I. I.

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Call no man your father or brother
Call no man your father or brother
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Edw Allen
London
Oxford

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S E R M O N I.

PROV. XXX. 7.

*Two things have I required of thee; deny me them
not before I die. Remove far from me vanity
and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches,
feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be
full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?
or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of
my God in vain.*

SUCH was the prayer of Agur, a man
celebrated for his wisdom, and whose pro-
verbs are joined to those of Solomon. We will
first explain the words in which his petition
is expressed, and then make some remarks
upon it.

There are two things, says Agur, which I
would willingly avoid, and which I humbly
beg that thou, O God, wouldst remove from
me; for by so doing thou wilt preserve me from

temptations to the worst and most dangerous sort of lying. Remove from me poverty and riches ; give me my bread by measure, for so the words mean, which are translated, *food convenient for me*. Agur seems to allude to the ancient custom of feeding slaves in great families. They had a certain measure of food daily allowed them ; so that a servant, who had an honest and wealthy master, was secure from want, though he had nothing superfluous ; he was kept in constant dependance, but he received a constant supply of the necessaries of life. Agur might also have in view the manner in which God fed the people of Israel in the wilderness with manna, of which they were commanded to gather daily a certain measure, but none for the morrow. That God would thus supply his wants from day to day, was his modest petition ; that so he might be induced daily to ask for subsistence, and daily to return thanks for the granted favour.

Now * follow the reasons for his request to be placed in a middle state between affluence and indigence.

* See a Discourse of Joseph Mede on this text, from which some remarks are borrowed.

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I would not be rich, says he, lest I be full, and lie, and say, Who is the Lord? That is, lest too much plenty should make me worldly-minded, profane, and irreligious. To say in a contemptuous manner, Who is the Lord? is to deny the being, or the providence of God. They may be denied by words, or by behaviour. To deny them by words, is to utter a lie; and to deny them by behaviour, may be called, to live a lie, and a lie of the most detestable kind.

I would not be in extreme want, says he, lest I steal, and take the name of my God in vain. Stealing is a crime, into which a poor man is in danger of falling, as not only Agur's fear, but daily experience may tell us.

The second sin that Agur mentions, is taking the name of God in vain, that is, perjury, which would follow upon stealing, as stealing upon poverty. The danger of perjury, upon the committing of theft, was greater amongst the Jews than amongst us, by reason of a custom or law amongst them, to tender an oath to those who were suspected of theft, and who were thus to clear themselves. For because theft was not punished by death in the law of Moses, but by restitution, and a certain fine or penalty; it was usual, if sufficient evidence

could not be produced for or against the accused person, to administer an oath to him; and it was supposed that the guilty party, especially where the legal punishment was gentle, would rather ingenuously confess his fault, than incur the heinous sin of perjury, and the heavy judgments which God had denounced against this crime, and which he often inflicted on the offenders. Not to add, that he could expect no mercy, if his sin should afterwards happen to be discovered.

In countries where theft or robbery is punished with death, a trial by oath would be highly improper; for it is very true, though it was spoken by the father of lies, *All that a man hath he will give for his life*, and usually he will say or do any thing to save it. But this manner of trial by oath was practised in some cases amongst the Jews. Hence it is that the prohibition of theft and perjury are joined together in Leviticus, because the one often drew on the other: Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another: and ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God. I am the Lord. Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, nor rob him. For the same reason, theft and swearing are coupled

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coupled together in the prophet Zechariah, and a curse is pronounced against them both: The curse, saith the Lord of hosts, shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name; and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it.

And indeed, not only the religious Jews abhorred the taking of God's holy name in vain, or in attestation to a lie; but the very Pagans also, from the remotest times, accounted perjury to be a most heinous provocation of the Deity, and though loose enough in other points of duty, and not abounding with moral principles, yet thought that this was a crime which would not go unpunished.

Thus you see what particular reason Agur had in regard to the custom of his own nation, to add to the first evil of stealing, the second of taking the name of God in vain, because the one was likely to bring on the other; for though, as we observed before, the punishment of theft was not usually very rigid, when the thief was willing and able to restore what the law required, yet when a needy and a profligate man had secretly purloined any thing, and eaten it up, and had nothing to make restitution with,

besides his own body, he lay under violent temptations to perjury, that he might avoid bondage and hard labour.

I shall now proceed to some general remarks upon the text.

We should interpret the prayer of this wise man in a favourable and candid manner, as put up by one who was religious and humble, and disposed to submit his own will to the will of God. We need not suppose of him that he prayed absolutely against riches, or absolutely against poverty; for poverty and riches are of themselves things indifferent, and the blessing of God may go with them both. But it is a prayer of choice, or a comparative prayer; as if he had said, Rather than either poverty or riches, give me, O God, if it be thy will, the middle between both, and feed me with food convenient for me. For though all the three estates be so far indifferent, that a man may be good, and ought to be content or resigned in any of them, yet, if it were matter of choice, the middle is the easiest and most desirable.

Riches, poverty, and a competency, these are things which cannot be accurately fixed, without reference to the state and condition of men. What would be wealth to one, might be poverty

verty to another; what would amply suffice for a single man, and in a private station, that a master of a large family, a magistrate, a noble person might have, and be exceeding poor. Therefore food convenient for a man is such a competency as will maintain him in that order, degree, or calling, in which God hath placed him.

Agur's prayer, as to the sense of it, is very like the petition in the Lord's prayer, Give us this day our daily bread. Nothing can redound more to his honour, than that his judgment should be confirmed by divine wisdom itself. And what we have observed concerning Agur's petition, is in some measure to be applied, by way of interpretation, to the petition in the Lord's prayer, Give us this day our daily bread, first, that it must be a conditional request, accompanied with a submission to the will of God, and secondly, that by it is meant a supply of the things which our situation in life requires.

The moderation of Agur's prayer is highly commendable, if we consider that he lived in a time, when temporal blessings were more expressly promised, and spiritual blessings less clearly propounded than under the Gospel; so that a good man might have carried his desires

of worldly conveniencies somewhat farther than becomes a Christian, who is trained up under a sublimer dispensation, and hath nobler examples to copy after: and yet Agur not only makes no petition for riches, but declares that he would be glad to have them kept from him, and makes it his choice to go without them.

A competency, or a middle state between want and superfluity, deserves to be preferred as the best and happiest condition. Such was the judgment of Agur, which stands recorded in Scripture as an instance of his wisdom. The wiser Gentiles were not of a different opinion; many of them have said the same thing in other words. They have observed that poverty is exposed to ridicule and ill usage, that it cramps and depresses the mind, withholds the means of improving the natural abilities, confines a man to servile labour, that he may supply the wants of the body, and often puts him upon sordid and dishonest tricks: they have observed that the Great and the Rich have often the inclination as well as the opportunity to indulge every vile and vicious passion, that they are looked upon with an evil eye, are envied and hated, and most exposed to danger in troublesome times, and have many cares and fears in
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all times; and that a middle condition is advantageously situated below envy, and above contempt.

It is observable that the reasons which the Pagans give for their choice, are reasons of convenience, and that the end which they have in view is their own ease and satisfaction: But Agur, who was instructed in the law of God, gives a reason for his choice, of which they seldom thought, a religious and pious reason; he would not be rich or poor, because he would not be wicked and offend God. This may serve to remind us how far superior not only Christianity is, but Judaism was to natural religion, as it was usually understood and practised by the Pagans.

And indeed if we carefully examine the political law of Moses, we shall find that the divine providence intended the Jewish people for that very situation between poverty and riches which was the object of Agur's wish. The means of accumulating great wealth by an extensive commerce, by circulating large sums of money upon large interest, by extending their dominions, and by planting colonies abroad, were withholden from them; and their own lands industriously cultivated, would
by

by the blessing of God furnish them with the necessaries, though not the superfluities of life.

Poverty, or extreme want, is represented by Agur as an undesirable condition; and if his opinion be right, to deprive ourselves of all our possessions, and to make vows of poverty, is not the way to perfection, nor an act of religion acceptable to God. Many Christians of old fell into this error, and many Christians still retain it or pretend to retain it, in their Religious Orders of Monks and Friars. As to the poverty of such Saints, the case is far from being clear. A man who, having no private property, belongs to a wealthy society, and lives at ease, and wants for nothing, can hardly be accounted poor, but rather enjoys himself with more quiet and less hazard than many a rich man. These Religious Societies, instead of being poor, but making many rich, have often been rich by making many people poor, by swallowing up the fortunes of ignorant and superstitious bigots.

They allege the counsel of our Saviour to the young man in the Gospel: If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven;

heaven; where Christ seems to prescribe poverty as the way to eternal life.

* But this was an extraordinary case, and is therefore not to be made a rule of ordinary practice. Besides, it is to be observed that our Saviour spake this to the young man by way of experiment. He made the proposal to him, upon his forward request, to prove him, and to teach him how much he was deceived, and how far his heart was short of that perfection which he fancied in himself, when he thought that he could attempt or undergo any thing that would recommend him to the favour of God. This was a trial indeed, for the text says, He went away sorrowful. And it is natural for us, when we read it, to be sorrowful too, for his sake, and to think it pity that with all his virtues he should have been lost. But since it is said of him, that Jesus loved him, loved him for his good qualities, there seems room to suppose, and to hope that though he then departed from Christ, he might afterwards join himself to the Apostles.

Secondly, the practice of the first Christians is alleged, who sold their lands and possessions.

* Jos. Mede.

But

But these were Jews, Jews dwelling in Judæa, who did so. The Gentiles did it not, when the Gospel came to them. None of St. Paul's Epistles contain any such precept, or intimate any such practice. But as for the Jews, who believed then in Christ, there was something particular in their case. They knew that Christ had foretold the destruction of their nation, which should come upon it before that generation were passed away; and therefore they thought it proper, whilst there was yet time, to improve to the best use their estates, which they should not many years enjoy. An occasion of liberality at that time presented itself; the Gospel then began to be published, and large collections were necessary to relieve those Christians, who were in want, and had lost every thing for the sake of the Gospel, and to enable the first teachers to pursue their travels from place to place. For this reason, the believers amongst the Jews set an illustrious example of disinterestedness and charity; and when the Gospel was also spread amongst the Gentiles, the Apostles seem to have been careful to make collections in all the Churches for the relief of the poor Saints of Jerusalem; since it was very just and expedient that provision

vision should be made for those who at the first had quitted and given up all, and at whose charges, as it may be supposed, the Gospel was at the beginning preached amongst some of the Gentiles.

There is then nothing commendable in superstitious and affected poverty. If poverty comes to us, we must be patient and resigned under it; it is no part of our duty to seek it out. But, to say the truth, there are few amongst us who are disposed to transgress this way.

Agur represents poverty as a state which exposes to the temptations of dishonesty and perjury. As to the first of these temptations, it attends poverty in all times and places; as to the second, it is plain from experience, that thieves and defrauders will forswear themselves, even when nothing compels them to swear at all. And then as to lying, which is next of kin to perjury, we know that to be the ordinary and almost unavoidable consequence of cheating and pilfering. So that Agur's reasons, for which he desires to be preserved from indigence, will fit us well enough.

Agur supposeth that though he were poor, and had not food convenient for him, yet it would

would be a sin to steal, which makes him pray against it, *Lest I be poor and steal.* Necessity is no small extenuation of the crime, and perhaps where it is extreme, it may take it quite away. But such cases rarely happen; and in general, poverty is not an excuse for stealing.

If it be a sin for a poor man to steal from the rich, it is beyond comparison a greater crime for a rich man to cheat and defraud the poor. Want is a strong temptation to fraudulent dealings, therefore Agur says, *Lest I be poor and steal; not, Lest I be rich and steal:* for why should a rich man steal? And yet this they will do in effect, nor is it very uncommon; not indeed in the way that poor people steal, but with an high hand, by oppression and overbearing, by injuring the public, by refusing to pay their debts, except they be debts of honour, and by endeavouring to ruin those whom they have wronged. We may suppose all such to be of the number of those whom Agur represents as saying, *Who is the Lord?* for it seems impossible for a man to act in this manner, who believes, I will not say Revealed religion, but a Deity and a future state.

Agur, in the text, prays that he may not be exposed to poverty, and to the temptations which

which accompany it. It is to be taken for granted that he, who was a wise man, added his endeavours to his petitions, and that he not only prayed against poverty, but provided against it; and indeed when he proceeds in the chapter to treat of other subjects, he makes mention of the industrious animals, who provide their yearly food in the summer, and proposes them as examples of wisdom. If we pray that we may never become poor and wicked, we must take care not to become poor by our own fault: for he who falls into want by living above his income and by a love of pleasure, is trained and prepared for all villainy. When he hath the appetites and desires of the rich, together with the needs and nakedness of the poor, when he is too lazy and unskilful to work, and too proud to beg, he is truly undone, and Safety itself cannot save him. In all faults, but more especially in these, the commission of one offence draws on another; and as a sinner is said to be in bonds, so is each single sin linked to another, and makes part of the chain which binds him fast.

Agur's desire was, that he might not be rich. Jacob's request to God was that he would give him food to eat, and raiment to put on. Our
 Lord

Lord hath permitted us to ask for no more than daily bread, or a bare competency. Having food and raiment, says the Apostle, let us be content. When God gives food and raiment, nothing is wanting on his part; it is our concern and our part to give ourselves a contented mind. In the whole Scripture, there is not one prayer for superfluity.

It is not unlawful to possess riches; they are of their own nature indifferent; they are called in Scripture the gift of God, and which is more the blessing of God. They are blessings when God offers them, though not blessings to those who covetously seek them. Many good men mentioned in sacred history were rich; but none of them are said to have been desirous of riches.

To those who never know when they have a sufficiency, and who are restless and mad after earthly things, to such persons riches prove no blessing. He that maketh haste to be rich, says Solomon, shall not be innocent. They that will be rich, says St. Paul, that is, whose principal care and concern it is to be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction.

Agur was apprehensive lest wealth should make him irreligious: and many things are said in the Scriptures, which shew that his fear was not without a just cause. God is represented offering prosperity to his people as an ambiguous gift, with some doubt and distrust, and hesitation, with a hand half-extended and half-drawn back, as though he feared it might do more harm than good. Like an indulgent parent, he gives it; and like a wise and considerate parent, he gives this caution along with it. When thou shalt have eaten and be full, then beware lest thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and thou say in thy heart, My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth. Again in Deuteronomy, Moses thus prophesies of Israel: Thou art waxed fat—Then he forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. And in Hosea, God complains of the completion of this prophecy: According to their pasture, says he, so were they filled, and their hearts were lifted up; therefore have they forgotten me. Great wealth and power and honours bring with them a variety of business, draw after them a multitude of flat-

terers, nourish pride and conceit, and afford continual means and opportunities of pursuing all sorts of pleasures; so that what with the cares, and what with the diversions of life, no time is left for God and religion.

It is indeed a strange and a perverse wickedness to abuse the abundance of God's gifts to the dishonour of him who bestows them, and by such a scandalous behaviour to furnish wicked men with arguments against divine providence. Ingratitude is ever odious even towards men, and for the favours which they can bestow. Much more detestable is unthankfulness to the giver of all good things. Yet the repeated benefits of generous friends will sometimes force an acknowledgment even from a thankless disposition, though a smaller kindness will not do it. But on the contrary, so much the more to wrong our Maker, the more he heaps upon us, this is not easily to be matched in the dealings between man and man. And yet thus are men used to behave towards God; not only to be unthankful, which were had enough, but to make their unthankfulness increase and keep pace with their increasing fortunes.

There

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There is then a plain and good reason why God for the most part withholds a great abundance of outward things from those whom he most loves, namely, lest by enriching the man, he should lose the servant.

It is very imprudent therefore in men earnestly to pursue that which so much endangers their welfare. It is a folly for a man never to think himself well, till he is in a state of peril. We daily pray that God would not lead us into temptation, and yet we long to be tempted. We have so good an opinion of ourselves, that we would fain be rich, for the advantage of the public, and that we may set a bright example of generosity and moderation. But as it is not true courage to seek out danger which we may avoid without loss of honour, so it is not true wisdom to covet a condition which hath spoilt many a good understanding and many an upright heart, and turned its prudence and innocence into folly and iniquity.

They to whom wealth hath presented itself, either unsought, or honestly obtained, ought to be very cautious and considerate. Their state is exposed to danger; and yet it is possible to be wise and happy and safe in it, if proper means be used. What those means are, they

may learn from St. Paul, who hath set them forth in the artless simplicity of plain words: Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

SERMON II.

PETER I. V. 5.

—Be clothed with humility.

IN my remarks upon the subject of Humility, I shall follow the usual method of discoursing upon moral virtues.

I. I will consider the nature and the effects of humility ;

II. I will represent the motives and inducements to the practice of it,

I. I will consider its nature and effects, and represent it in these three views :

As it relates to our own private thoughts, and is confined to ourselves :

As it respects our duty to God ;

As it influences our conduct towards our neighbour.

Humility, as it relates to our own private thoughts and judgment, requires that we should entertain no better an opinion of ourselves than

we deserve. To judge too hardly and severely of ourselves, and to fancy that we are guilty of faults from which we are free, cannot be acts of humility, because there can be no virtue in mistake and ignorance. Only as we have all a propensity to extenuate our defects, and to over-rate our good deeds, it is safest to err on the other side, to correct this bent by forcing the mind somewhat towards the contrary way, and frequently to review our failings, and the many causes which we have of rejecting all arrogant and conceited thoughts.

Our Maker hath conferred upon us several gifts which we cannot possibly value too much, as long as we acknowledge them to come from him, and endeavour to make a right use of them. It shews ingratitude and ill-nature to lessen and undervalue the benefits which we receive from our friends; and to behave in this manner towards God, is still more blameable. In forming therefore a mean and despicable opinion of ourselves in particular, and of human nature in general, there may be not only no sound judgment, no modesty, no goodness of any sort, but error, ignorance, malevolence, and depravity of heart.

Some

Some of the unbelieving and irreligious tribe have said that a persuasion of the soul's immortality and of future rewards arose from the presumption and vanity of man, who being proud and high-minded, fancies himself a more considerable and important animal than he really is; whilst they, throwing aside these prejudices, and aspiring to no such dignity, meekly acknowledge themselves to be brethren to the brutes, and expect after a few days to perish with them. This is humility; but it is so only in a bad sense, in the sense which the Romans used to fix upon the word, intending to express by it a sordid and mean spirit.

Others have affirmed that man never performs any good action, that all his seeming virtues are real vices, because self-love and a regard to his own interest is at the bottom of them, and conducts him in every step that he takes.

They who entertain such injurious notions of human nature, forfeit all claim to the approbation and esteem of others. Charity itself, which thinketh no evil, cannot judge favourably of those who would transform every thing into vice, and banish all virtue from the earth.

Others, who are much better persons than the former, think that it is God who does all in and for the righteous in an arbitrary and irresistible manner, giving to some and refusing to others that assistance without which every one must perish. And this notion is, as they pretend, the very character of humility; whilst they really, though I will not say designedly, detract from the goodness and justice, and wisdom of God, and confound the notions of virtue and vice.

Lastly, there are some who have too mean an opinion of their own abilities, and by fancying themselves to be useless, become so, and dare not attempt many things in which they are capable of succeeding, and which they ought to perform. This behaviour arises more from indolence or melancholy than from humility.

Humility then, as it relates to the judgment which we form concerning ourselves, is a due sense of our imperfections; of those which are common to human nature, and of those which are more peculiarly our own.

The imperfections common to human nature are these:

Mortality,

Mortality, which came into the world by sin, and all the bad consequences attending it, a body weak and frail, and exposed to various disorders and diseases, which, as it is united to the soul, hath a great influence upon its operations, and often proves an impediment to its progress towards wisdom and goodness.

A stronger propensity to evil than to good, which all persons at certain times and on certain occasions have experienced, and guilt from some degrees of which none was ever free.

An understanding liable to be frequently deceived, and a knowledge which at the best is much confined.

The infirmities peculiar to ourselves are those defects either in goodness, or in knowledge, or in wisdom, by which we are inferior to other persons.

To be sensible of these weaknesses and faults, is humility, as it relates to ourselves; to lessen or overlook them, is pride.

Let us now consider the effects which humility produces towards God.

Here it is also necessary to distinguish between true and false humility. That God is most just and holy, and that we are sinners, that the Gospel contains a perfect rule of righteousness, and

and that the best of us in many things transgress this rule; these are truths of which we ought to have a serious and a constant sense.

But there are here also extremes which should be avoided; for we may form too abject and too bad an opinion of ourselves, or we may represent God as a most strict and severe and inexorable master, or we may imagine that a perfection which we are not able to acquire, is enjoined to us as necessary to salvation, or we may fear that repentance and amendment shall avail us nothing; or we may make religion to consist principally in a set of trifling and difficult rules, from which if we swerve, our mistaken conscience will condemn us. Such notions as these have in a greater or a lesser degree possessed many minds, and hence hath arisen a slavish dread and horror of God, and a devotion over-run with superstition and uncommanded austerities. This is not humility, but ignorance, abject fear, and religious melancholy.

True and rational humility, as it influences our behaviour towards our Maker, produces a religious awe, and banishes presumption and carelessness and vain-glory. The humble person, considering the perfections of God, and
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comparing them with his own imperfections, approaches him with reverence, and acknowledges himself unworthy of his favour, and unable without his assistance to perform his duty, to obtain either temporal conveniencies or eternal life. He trusts not to his own heart, or wisdom, or strength. He frequently recollects and confesses his omissions and transgressions, and uses them as motives to greater industry and watchfulness. He receives temporal good from the hands of God with gratitude; and temporal evil with resignation, as a correction which he deserves, as a trial of his obedience, and as intended for his benefit.

The effects which humility produces in our behaviour towards men are now to be considered; and here also the same distinction is to be repeated which was made before, namely, that there is a deceitful and false humility which ought to be avoided. Thus some speak contemptibly of themselves, and pretend that they are ignorant of things in which they are well-skilled, and acknowledge themselves inferior to those whom they surpass; some pay a servile deference to the opinions and directions of others, and dare not use that reason and understanding which God has given them; some
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shun the conversation of their equals, and chuse companions of the lowest sort; and all these persons either fancy themselves to be humble, or would be accounted so by the world. Yet in such a conduct there may be no humility and modesty, but hypocrisy, or affectation, or bigotry, or a meanness of spirit mixed with pride and vanity.

Between an unmanly contempt and disregard of ourselves, with an abject fear and blind reverence of others, which is one extreme, and a proud, conceited, overbearing insolence, which is the other extreme, true humility proceeds, always uniform and decent.

The humble person never assumes what belongs not to him; he desires to possess no more power, and to receive no more respect and compliance from others than is suitable to his own character and condition, and appointed by the laws and customs of society.

He is not a rigid exactor of the things to which he has an undoubted right; he can overlook and excuse many faults: he is not greatly disturbed and provoked at those slights and affronts which put vain and haughty persons out of all patience.

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He is easy and quiet in his station, though he may deserve a better; not inclined to trouble the world with complaints and solicitations.

He can behold the success, much more the abilities and virtues of others, with the same even temper, and is not disposed to hate, or slander, or envy them upon that account.

The good and useful qualities with which he is endued he employs in a prudent and unaffected manner, neither concealing them when they ought to appear, nor putting them forth for the sake of applause.

He is obedient to his superiors in things just and lawful, rendering tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.

He is dutiful to his parents, teachers, and masters, courteous towards his equals, condescending towards his inferiors, merciful and placable towards his enemies, gentle and patient towards those who are in error, or overtaken in a fault.

He is candid in his judgment, and more inclined, when there is any room for it, to think and speak favourably than hardly.

He exercises power, if it be committed to him, with justice and impartiality, tempered with

with as much forbearance and lenity as is consistent with the public good.

II. The nature of humility has been considered. Let us now, secondly, consider the motives to the practice of it.

1. Humility is a virtue so excellent, that the Scriptures have in some sort ascribed it even to God himself.

Humility is a right opinion and estimate of ourselves, producing a suitable behaviour towards others. But as in ourselves we find much imperfection, a dependence always upon God, and often upon men, and no good quality which we can call entirely our own, and for which we are not indebted to our Maker; hence it is that humility consists principally in a due sense of our defects, our transgressions, our wants, and the obligations which we have received. Therefore such humility cannot be in God, in Him who possesses all perfections. But there is a part of humility, as it relates to our behaviour towards men, called condescension; and this is sometimes represented in Scripture as a disposition not unworthy of the Divine Nature. "The Lord is high above all, his glory is above the heavens; yet he humbleth himself to behold the things that are

in heaven and earth." Again; "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly." Again; "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" that is, that thou condescendest to take notice and care of him. This condescension is ascribed to God, not as if it were an occupation below him, or unworthy of his power and wisdom; but because a like behaviour in men towards their inferiours is called condescension. And in us it is called condescension, because we descend, not from our dignity, but from that false and foolish superiority and state which vain and conceited persons usurp and maintain.

2. The example of our Saviour is an example of every virtue, particularly of humility. He himself calls upon us to observe and imitate it, to come and learn of him to be meek, lowly in heart, patient, calm, and condescending.

His humility appears in most of the actions and circumstances of his life; in his birth, by which he became the child of a parent not less poor than virtuous; in the obscurity which he chose till he entered into his ministry; in his care to conceal his dignity upon most occasions; in his submission to the ceremonial Law,

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to the civil government, to wicked magistrates, to extreme want, and to extreme sufferings; in continually promoting, not his own glory, but the glory and honour of his Father; in his behaviour towards those who sought him, and towards those whom he himself took the pains to seek and to save, towards the ignorant and the mistaken, the sorrowful and penitent, the sick and needy, towards his friends and followers, and towards his accusers, betrayers, slanderers, persecutors, and murderers.

3. In the behaviour of the angels, as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures, we find that part of humility called condescension, or a willing and cheerful submission to any offices by which the good of others may be promoted. We are there taught that they have been, and that they always are ready, at God's appointment, to guide, to direct, to succour, to comfort, to instruct, to assist, to relieve, to protect and deliver good men. Thus are they ministering spirits; and in the intercourse between us and them, the labour and the attendance is theirs, the profit is ours; we are ministered unto, and they minister. Hence we must learn to think it no disgrace to be, as our Lord says he was, the servants of all, to be occupied

cupied in procuring the ease, the improvement, the welfare, and the happiness of our brethren, and to account no acts base and mean, which produce so noble and excellent effects. In truth we cannot be more creditably employed; nor can the holy Angels better shew the excellence of their nature, than in thus stooping to our necessities; for it is more blessed, and more honourable too, to give than to receive. They bestow upon us substantial benefits, and we can return them nothing besides reverence and gratitude. Whosoever best imitates these holy Spirits in humility, and condescension towards his inferiors, approaches nearest to them in dignity; and whilst he abases himself, his actions exalt him.

4. It is affirmed in many places of Scripture that humility secures to us the favour of God, and will bring down his blessing upon ourselves and our undertakings.

“ He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; with the lowly is wisdom: before honour is humility: honour shall uphold the humble in spirit: God shall save the humble: he giveth grace to the lowly, and exalteth the humble and meek: whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same is greatest

in the kingdom of heaven : thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity ; I dwell in the high and holy place ; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit ; to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word : them that are meek will God guide in judgment, and such as are gentle, them will he teach his way : he hath hidden the most valuable knowledge, that is, religious knowledge, from the wise and prudent, and hath revealed it unto babes."

From these passages we may observe that humility is highly acceptable to God ; in general, because it is a virtue ; in particular, because it disposes men to receive with modest submission the great truths of religion, to be willing to receive instruction, to yield to reason, and when there is sufficient evidence that a doctrine or precept is from God, to believe and observe it.

5. Humility usually gains the esteem and love of men, and consequently the conveniences, at least the necessities of life. Every one who has even slightly observed what passes in the world, must see and know this. Since all love themselves, they will probably approve

prove and favour those who never provoke, insult, deride, or injure them, who shew them respect and civility, and do them good offices. The humble person therefore takes the surest way to recommend himself to those with whom he is joined in society, to increase the number of his well-wishers and friends, and to escape or defeat the assaults of detraction, envy, and malice. This amiable quality will stand by him, will be a protector and benefactor to him in all stations, and through all his days, particularly when he first enters into business and appears in public. Then the want of this one virtue is enough to ruin the person who stands so much in need of assistance, instruction, and recommendation. He who is young and unexperienced, proud and insolent, will scarcely be able to improve either his mind or his fortunes, and if he falls, will fall unpitied.

6. Such are the present advantages which humility usually secures to us from God and from men ; usually, I say, but not constantly ; because it is possible that an humble person may be neglected by the world, and that God may not interpose in his behalf, and may defer his reward to the next life. Therefore the most certain present recompense of humility is

that which arises from its own nature, and with which it repays the mind that entertains it; and a very valuable recompense it would be, though it were the only one allotted to this virtue.

An humble person neither hates nor envies any one; therefore he is free from those very turbulent and uneasy vices which are always a punishment to themselves.

He is not discomposed by the slights or censures of others. If he has undesignedly given some occasion for them, he amends the fault; if he deserves them not, he regards them as little.

He is contented with his condition, if it be tolerable: and therefore he finds satisfaction in all that is good, and overlooks and in some measure escapes all that is inconvenient in it.

He has a due sense of his unworthiness and defects, by which he is taught to bear calamities with patience and submission, and thereby to soften their harsh nature, and to allay their violence.

He is free from pride and ambition; therefore he never sacrifices his integrity, his honour, and his peace of mind, those substantial blessings, to the splendid trifles which are the objects

jects of pride and ambition. He desires not to obtain them at all, much less to obtain them in the common way, by sordid flattery, by sinful compliances, by dissimulation, by lying and flandering, by deceiving and over-reaching, by violence and oppression, by loss of time, by useless occupations, by dangerous attempts, by profusion and extravagance, by methods which have been pernicious to the fortunes, to the body, and to the mind of multitudes.

7. Lastly, From the account which we have given of humility, we may draw this conclusion, that it is not, as the insolent and haughty are inclined to imagine, an unmanly and sordid disposition. It is true that the word * *humility* is used by Latin writers in a bad sense for meanness of spirit; but the Pagans were not ignorant of this virtue, and have recommended it; only they gave it another name. Christianity indeed hath taught us juster notions of humility than they commonly entertained; for they usually considered *humility*, which they called *modesty*, or *moderation*, as a social virtue, as it influenced our behaviour towards ourselves and towards men; but humility towards God few

* See *Disc.* VII. on the Christian Religion.

of them seem to have sufficiently apprehended. It is indeed a virtue so remote from meanness of spirit, that it is no bad sign of a great and exalted mind. An humble person is one who is neither puffed up with approbation and applause, nor greatly provoked or disturbed by censure and ill usage, who envies none placed above him, and despises none below him, who dares examine his own conduct, and condemn whatsoever is faulty in it, who is gentle to others and severe to himself, who desires to obtain no more than he deserves, who can quit even that also, if his duty requires it, who is contented to act the part which providence allots to him, who is free from irregular self-love, that is from one of the most insinuating and prevailing weaknesses of mankind, which may not improperly be called the inner garment of the soul, the first which it puts on, and the last which it puts off. If this be not, it will be hard to say what is greatness of mind.

On the contrary, if we would know what meanness of spirit is, and how it acts, let us look for it amongst the proud and insolent, and we shall not lose our labour. A proud man is one who is glad to receive homage and flattery, though it be offered to him by the most ignorant

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rant or worthless, and cannot bear contempt even from them ; who therefore is the servant or slave of all, not in a good sense, but because his happiness depends upon their opinion and behaviour ; who has no heart to own his obligations to God and man, whose life and conduct is one continual lie, who assumes good qualities which he has not, and is blind to his own faults ; who desires to possess what he should not, and what he often cannot obtain ; and who is much dissatisfied when he is disappointed. These are the persons who despise humility, and by despising recommend it,

S E R M O N III.

MATTH. XXVI. 39.

O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

THESE words of our Lord are generally and justly understood and acknowledged to contain a perfect act of resignation to the good pleasure of God; yet something of a difficulty there may seem to be in them. Not as I will, but as thou wilt. Our Lord then had a will quite different from the will of God. The will of God was that he should suffer a painful and ignominious death: his own will was not to suffer it. But how could this will be in Christ, when we know that he performed in all things the most exact obedience, and that to do the will of his Father was his meat and drink, his constant employment, and his greatest delight?

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We must observe then that our Lord was made like unto us in all things, sin excepted, and that upon this and other occasions he experienced in himself what we also frequently find within us, two contrary wills, or to speak more accurately, a strife between inclination and reason; in which cases, though reason gets the better of inclination, we may be said to do a thing * willingly, yet with an unwilling mind. Thus a good man placed in such circumstances, that he must undergo great hardships, or act against his duty, is desirous, as he is a man, not to suffer pain, for human nature shuns and dislikes it; but he is more desirous of doing his duty, and when he is resolved to choose what is right, and for the sake of it to submit to that which offends and crosses his natural inclinations, he may say, with our Lord, Not my will, but the will of God be done. Thus Christ foretelling to Peter what death he should die, says, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest

* Εὐδὸν, ἀκούσῃ γὰρ θυμῷ.

not; that is, to crucifixion, to a punishment which thou, as all other men, wouldest naturally desire to avoid. And yet that St. Peter suffered it with Christian fortitude is not to be doubted.

The great end of our Lord's sufferings, was to save and redeem us: but there are many other excellent ends for which they serve; as, for instance, to set before us an example of resignation to God's will in all calamities, and to be a comfort to us under them. In this view I shall at present consider them, proposing,

I. To shew how the Son of God exercised this virtue here upon earth:

II. To recommend to ourselves the imitation of his example.

I. I shall shew how our Lord exercised this virtue here upon earth.

Christ pleased not himself, says St. Paul, did not consult his own pleasure, ease, and quiet, and for the sake of them neglect any part of his office; he came, as himself tells us, not to do his own will, but the will of his Father; and by the wise appointment of God he was, through the course of his ministry exercised with variety of heavy trials, subject to many inconveniences and pains from which men desire to be free,

free, and deprived of many good things which they desire to possess, that so he might practise in its full extent the duty of acquiescence to the divine will. A distinct view and consideration of all that he thus endured may be very useful to us.

We all desire to enjoy the conveniencies of life, and to be above dependence. Even they who set not their hearts upon wealth and honours, yet start at the thoughts of the opposite state, and cannot look Want in the face, and are ready to say with Him in the Proverbs, Give me neither poverty nor riches. Yet to this extreme poverty our Lord humbly submitted. He was born and educated in a family, which was noble indeed, and of royal descent, but in very low circumstances; he had no house of his own where he could lay his head, nothing except what he received from some liberal and charitable persons, who ministered to him of their substance, and no money to pay the tribute when it was demanded of him. Ye know, says St. Paul, the grace, that is, the loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might
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be rich. For your sakes he became poor. The * word in the original is stronger, and means, for your sakes he was in the utmost indigence.

Yet though in the New Testament we find proofs and instances of the extreme poverty of our Lord, we read of no complaint there upon that account, not a word expressing a dislike of such a state: on the contrary, he speaks favourably of poverty, recommends it to those whose lot it is, as a condition exposed to fewer temptations and dangers than worldly prosperity, and which patiently undergone shall turn to their advantage in the next life.

Hard labour attended with weariness, is disagreeable. Even those active spirits who hate idleness, and delight in employment, would not have the toil long and uninterrupted, and love intervals of repose. Our Saviour's life, during his ministry, was a life of hardship and fatigue. He was constantly taking journeys on foot, discoursing whole days to the people, and often at night, when others were at rest, retiring to bleak mountains and deserts, to spend

* *ἑνὶ ἑσπέρῳ.*

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those hours in meditation and prayer, and the next day renewing his accustomed toils.

Hunger and thirst, when long endured, are enemies to our nature, and put us to violent uneasiness till they are satisfied. These also our Lord often suffered, oftener in all probability than the Evangelists have mentioned, as he was frequently busy, and sometimes in places where no refreshment was to be had; nor do we read that he ever wrought a miracle to feed himself.

All this he underwent not only without any impatience and repining, but willingly and readily, losing no opportunity of doing good to men's minds and bodies, going where he was intreated to come, and where he was not intreated, seeking and saving that which was lost, conversing freely with sinners, and eating with them, that he might win them over to the love of virtue, and rejoicing to see the multitudes gathered together to hear the word of God from him. Never did he then dismiss and disappoint them, to consult his own repose, and to avoid the inconvenience and trouble of so much company; but taught them heavenly truths, as they were able to receive them; and

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if his disciples shewed any dislike when the people pressed into his presence, he rebuked them for their froward and impatient behaviour.

When after his long fast in the wilderness he was hungry, and the Devil tempting him advised him to turn stones into bread, he answers, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. When his disciples bring him provisions, knowing him to be spent, and in great need of them, and intreat him, Master, eat; he puts it off: I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him aught to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

To those who have the instruction of others committed to their care, it is agreeable to meet with persons teachable and of good capacities, and tiresome to inform slow understandings. Our Lord, knowing that the glory of God, and the good of mankind required it, chose for his disciples persons of mean rank and education, honest and well-disposed men, but ignorant, and dull, and apt to mistake him. Yet with these
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he spent most of his time, when he was not teaching the people; these he instructed with the greatest patience, and by repeated lessons, and never said any thing harder to them than, Are ye also without understanding? How is it that ye do not perceive?

Returns of baseness and treachery from our intimates whom we have loaded with benefits, are most grievous to be borne, and will wring from the mildest temper such complaints as these: It is not an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour; for then I could have borne it: but it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend. Christ amongst his disciples nourished a viper and a traitor, whom no warnings could call to repentance, no kindness could soften, and was forced, knowing that it was part of his office, to converse familiarly with this abandoned man, whose heart and inmost thoughts he perfectly saw: and even to him he shewed great lenity. He let him know that he was acquainted with his treachery, and charitably foretold him the consequences of it: The Son of man goeth, as it is written of him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed. This would not reclaim him;
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and therefore Christ gave him up as one irrecoverably lost; but yet without reproaches: What thou dost, says he to Judas, do quickly: and when he was by him delivered up to the Jews, his reproof was; * Companion, wherefore art thou come? Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

A good man, whose office it is to instruct others in religion, will be grieved when his charitable labours are lost, and he hath to do with stubborn offenders, who are deaf to all reproofs and admonitions. Our Lord was unsuccessful in his ministry. The harvest indeed was great; but he saw it not whilst he lived upon earth. He drew all men after him; but he was first lifted up, disobeyed, set at nought, and crucified by that faithless generation. How much this affected him we plainly see from the complaints which he often poured out, and the just anger which he expressed on some occasions. Yet this pity and grief, mixed with indignation and resentment at their obstinacy, was for their sake. He continued his kind endeavours to win them over to obedience, and to save them from ruin.

* So it should be translated; *Elais*, Sodalls, Companion, Matt. xxvi. 50.

To be injured in our reputation, and exposed to malicious calumny, is a great trial of human patience; for it is our duty in these circumstances both to forgive our enemies, and also not to be over-concerned at reproaches which our conscience tells us that we deserve not. But they who have not learned by repeated endeavours to govern their passions, find such an evenness of temper, and such a charitable disposition, hard to be acquired. This trial our Saviour long endured: never was man more defamed and slandered than he. Yet still he went about, doing good, and ready to relieve, to instruct, and to pardon them. He told them, that whatsoever they spake against the Son of man, might be pardoned; and his dying words were prayers to God to forgive them, because they knew not what they did.

To see multitudes involved in a great calamity, is a grief to a charitable man, especially when they are his countrymen, when they are miserable through their own fault, and might have avoided those evils by amending their ways. Our Lord loved all mankind with an unparalleled love: greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. For a good, or a merciful man, per-
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adventure some would even dare to die: but whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. But though he was thus affected towards all mankind, yet, like other men, he had a more particular love for those of his own nation; and amongst his disciples and acquaintance some seem to have had a greater share in his friendship than others, as Lazarus and St. John. His love for his ungrateful country caused in him the utmost sorrow, when he reflected upon the miseries that would shortly overtake it. The Jews had then nigh filled up the measure of their iniquities, the days of vengeance were at hand, and evils which eye had not seen, nor ear heard. When Christ was entering into Jerusalem, the sight of it brought to his thoughts those divine judgments: the dreadful scene was as plainly before him as if he had seen it all acted; and it made him burst into tears, and passionately lament over that unhappy city.

Future evils, when we see them coming, and are sure that we cannot escape them, torment us near if not quite as much as when they are present. And though it may seem a folly to make ourselves uneasy at things which we do not yet endure, or which must unavoidably

Come to pass, yet so we are * made, and cannot possibly help it. With great † kindness therefore God hath concealed from us future events, and keeps us in a happy ignorance, and reserves from us a knowledge which might make us miserable creatures all the days of our life. Our Lord, who was a man like to us, had this human infirmity. He was cast down at the foresight of the painful and ignominious death which he was to suffer. Long before it came, the thought of it was still uppermost in his mind, and he often told his disciples what he should endure : so that he might be truly said to die daily. As it drew near, he says ; Now is my soul troubled ; and what shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour : but for this cause came I unto this hour. On the evening before his passion, he was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Afterwards he began to be sorrowful and very heavy,

* ——— The expectation more
Of worse torments me than the feeling can.
I would be at the worst ; worst is my port,
My harbour, and my ultimate repose,
The end I would attain, my final good. *Milton.*

† Prudens futuri temporis exitum
Caliginosa nocte premit Deus.

and

and said; My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. Yet in all this hard conflict which he endured within himself, this extreme dejection, this fear and anguish and horror and consternation, no impatient word fell from his mouth, nothing that did not express a perfect submission to the will of God.

Lastly; Men love life, and are unwilling to lose it. Death in any shape, and at any time, is usually unacceptable; a death attended with great pain and infamy is so grievous and terrible, that it requires an uncommon strength of mind to meet it with constancy. St. Peter, who was by nature courageous, and who drew his sword in defence of his master, and would have laid down his life undauntedly in the heat of the action, was quite overcome by the fears of suffering as a malefactor, and shamefully denied his Lord.

Most painful and ignominious was the death which Christ endured, and he bare it, as a good man might, with humble resignation to the will of God, yet not without that dislike, those fears, that concern and dejection, to which natural infirmity makes the best of persons often liable.

When we consider the unspotted innocence of our Saviour, and the great and good ends for which he laid down his life, and his certain knowledge that he should arise again, and ascend into heaven, and sit at God's right hand, it may seem strange that he should have shewed so much consternation at the approach of death. If all this will not support human nature under afflictions, what is there that possibly can? But it was the good pleasure of God, doubtless for many wise reasons of providence, that our Lord should be in an eminent manner a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, according to the predictions of Isaiah.

Before he suffered, he fell into an agony at the thoughts of it; and when they came to seize him, the manner and the circumstances of it somewhat raised his resentment; and we see in his expressions, though they were tempered with great moderation, the offence which a man conscious of his own innocence takes, when he is treated as a villain. Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves? When he was upon the cross, he cried out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? We must not imagine that God was then angry and displeased with him, who never loved him

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more than at that instant. But you should observe that these words of our Saviour are the very words of David in the beginning of the twenty-second Psalm; and our Saviour repeated them on this occasion, to shew that he was the person foretold in that Psalm, and that in his person the words of David were accomplished, and that therefore he was the true Messias. It appeared that God did not forsake him entirely; for after this, he uttered no more complaints: he said, It is finished: his work was ended, and so were his sorrows. With serenity and composure of mind he recommended his soul into the hands of his Father, and gave up the ghost.

II. Such was the meek and resigned conduct of our Lord under trials as many and as great as can well be conceived. It remains, secondly, to recommend his behaviour to be copied by Christians in trials of a like sort.

To suffer in some degree, is as unavoidable as it is to breathe and to think. Through such trials we must all expect to pass: we cannot, and our Lord would not, escape them. That man is born to trouble, is a law which he came not to destroy, but to fulfill; and as he

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became a man, he became also a man of sorrows. But though he would not free us from the calamities and inconveniences of life, yet, which is more than we could have expected, and as much as we can reasonably desire, he enables us to bear them by the religion that he hath taught us. Nature says, Man is born to trouble: Revelation says, A good man is born to happiness. Nature says, Man is born to die: Revelation says, A good man dies to rise again unto life eternal. We must set the one against the other, and be thankful that since, as we are men, labour and sorrow is our patrimony; as we are Christians, glory and immortality may be our inheritance.

The motives which we have to resignation under any inconveniences, any distress or evil that may befall us, cannot be fully discussed in the remaining part of this discourse. I shall in few words lay them before you.

One great motive to it, and which comprehends in it almost all the rest, is the goodness of God. Upon this all our hope and comfort is founded. A belief of this will make us submit to any thing that God shall impose upon us; it will reconcile us to inconveniences, even for this reason, because it is his pleasure.

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Another motive to resignation is, that calamities, if we make a right use of them, may be very profitable to us, and that they plainly conduce to excellent ends. They remind us to enter into ourselves, and to examine the past faults of our lives; they lead us to repentance, they wean us from too great a fondness for a world which we must soon leave, and set our affections on proper objects; they keep us out of the reach of many temptations to which a state of affluence and prosperity lies continually exposed; and they soften our hearts, and teach us humanity and compassion towards those who are in affliction.

Another inducement to resignation is that reward in heaven which we may secure.

If indeed it were evident that this state was our all, these few days our only portion, men, at least the unhappier part of men, could scarcely account themselves the offspring of a good and merciful Author, but children of Sorrow, forced into being they knew not how or why, and exposed to all the injuries that unrelenting Nature should lay upon them. A future state removes all pleas for discontent; and when eternal happiness is promised to sincere endeavours, we may well submit with decent pa-

tience to afflictions of a short continuance, and to imperfections which we shall soon cast off, and in all circumstances pay to divine Providence the reasonable duty of believing that it orders all for the best.

Lastly, Another motive to resignation is the behaviour of our Lord, which we, who assume the honourable name of Christians, should be ambitious to imitate. Would we learn to act as we ought under the evils that may probably some time or other overtake us? We need no other book besides the New Testament, and no other example than our Saviour's, to instruct us. His sufferings and conduct under them is one of the most agreeable and most useful meditations that can occupy our minds, especially if we ourselves are in any of the same hard circumstances. To reflect then upon the majestic and resplendent parts of his life and character, affords not the same relief to a dejected mind. To view him commanding all nature, saying to the sea and to the winds, Peace, be still; and to the dead, Come forth; to view him striking to the ground those who came to take him, by only saying, I am he; and rising triumphant from the grave, and ascending in the clouds to heaven; to view him thus, will excite our reverence,

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rence, and confirm our belief in him : but there is nothing in all this that we can imitate and apply to ourselves. It is more pleasing to view him, where he appears as one of us, as much distressed and as little regarded as any of us can be ; to consider him possessing nothing, and attended with a few friends almost as poor as himself ; enduring hunger, thirst, cold, and weariness, slandered and reviled, despised and betrayed, scourged and crucified ; to consider him bearing affliction, not with Stoical scorn and unconcern, as though he neither felt pain, nor was sensible of injuries, but deeply affected with fear and horror, with sorrow and despondency ; bending to the earth under the heavy hand of God, offering up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, and almost asking what, as he well knew, was not to be obtained ; to see him thus compassed about, as with afflictions, so also with human infirmities ; to see him in all these trials persisting in an uniform obedience to God, exercising the utmost charity and long-suffering towards men, towards his enemies and persecutors ; encountering evils most disagreeable to human nature with patience and silent meekness, without repining and without murmuring.

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In these things he is to us an example not so vastly above us; an example which, by the assistance of God, we may hope, though not to equal, yet in some degree to resemble. The Apostles recommend it to us, supposing that we may come somewhat near to it. They exhort us in general to live as he lived, in particular to imitate the humility, patience, and resignation which he shewed when he suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.

If we carefully meditate on the life of Christ, and study to conform our own to it, and apply for aid to Him who is always found of those who seek him, peace of mind, and that silent and sedate pleasure which ariseth from obedience, will follow us through all states, making the best far more agreeable than it would else be, and administering a relief under the worst, which will render it supportable.

I am sensible that to talk to gay and inconsiderate persons of any degree of pleasure joined to adversity, is in their opinion to talk in an enthusiastic strain; but there are pleasures of the serious and even of the melancholy kind. The joy of the first believers under ill usage and heavy trials is mentioned in the New Testament;

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ment; and St. Paul thought it no contradiction to say of himself and of other servants of Christ, that they were sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Our Saviour, without question, though in a most eminent manner a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, yet often enjoyed a sober and exalted pleasure, which no man besides himself ever felt, as he was the most holy and beneficent of all men, and the only one in whom no sin was found. To rejoice in prosperity, Nature will teach us: To rejoice in the hope of immortality, our Lord will enable us, if we consent to be guided by him; and of this joy, adversity itself will not deprive us.

S E R M O N

ment; and St. Paul thought it no contradiction
to say of himself and other teachers of Christ,
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and exalted pleasure, which no man desires
without ever less, as he was the most holy and
perfect of all men, and the only one in
whom sin was found. To rejoice in this
life, Jesus will teach us: To rejoice in
the life of immortality, our Lord will en-
lighten us, if we continue to be guided by him;
and of this joy, heavenly itself will be the

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R o m. ii. 6.

*Who will render to every man according to his
deeds.*

OF the doctrines contained in the Christian religion, there are some which only a divine revelation could have ascertained to us, and there are others which human reason was capable of discovering. Of the first kind is the resurrection of the dead, by which is to be understood that we who now are men, consisting of soul and body, shall again be what we now are, human creatures, knowing ourselves to be the same persons; and that this shall in all respects be a happy change for the righteous, whose souls shall be improved in every thing that is good and great, and whose bodies shall be exempted from the imperfections, diseases, and decays which are inseparable attendants on frail mortality. Nearly of
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the same kind is the gracious promise made to sinners in general, that upon their repentance and amendment they shall be forgiven, and received hereafter into a state of peace and content, in some of the various mansions appointed for the servants of God, which is a greater favour than they could have collected with full certainty from the mere light of reason. Amongst the Christian doctrines which the human understanding might have discerned, as the being of one supreme God, most powerful, wise, and good, the continuance of the soul after death, and a state of retribution. .

A great part of the doctrine of the Scriptures concerning another life and a future judgment was plain enough in itself, and might have been generally known; but through the ignorance and the wickedness of men was in a manner lost to the world, and for that reason may be truly said to be brought to light by our Saviour.

Not only in the text, but in other places of the New Testament, it is declared that all men shall give an account of themselves to God; that not only all Jews and Christians, but they who never heard of any revelation, shall be judged according to their works; whence it manifestly follows, that all men might have expected

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expected a future state, and by a right use of their understanding might have supposed it very probable.

This doctrine, as it hath the greatest influence upon the actions of thinking beings, is so far of all doctrines the most important. That men are less wicked, or more virtuous, than they would else be, is to be ascribed to the belief of this, more than to any other motive; and they who can persuade themselves that it is false, are beyond the power of reason, and nothing besides immediate pain and punishment can awaken and convince them.

There are many considerations which concur to shew the certainty of this doctrine.

I. We may easily perceive that we brought not ourselves into being, and that we owe what we possess to some Cause more powerful than ourselves; that the world in which we are placed bears in every part of it visible signs of great wisdom, power, and goodness. It is impossible that the world should be the work of beings many in number, and immensely remote from each other, and consequently much limited in knowledge, power, and wisdom. It is impossible that it should have been formed, either in time or from all eternity, by itself, or

by chance, or by necessity. It is therefore most reasonable to suppose that there is one great Mind, which placed in proper order, and preserves, and directs, and governs all that we behold; which is without beginning and without end, adorned with every perfection, most good, and the author of all good.

If we live according to the laws of reason and virtue, we find that we can free ourselves from many wild and extravagant desires, from desires of wealth, and worldly power, and vicious pleasures, from desires of revenge, cruelty, and oppression; but one desire sticks fast to us as human nature itself, the desire of immortality. We would willingly continue for ever, for ever enjoy the power of reasoning and reflecting, of viewing the various works of God, of inquiring after truth, and acquiring knowledge and experience. If we could possess an endless life, with an exemption from bodily pain, and from the ill offices of wicked beings, we should think ourselves most happy, and beyond expression obliged to our Maker.

It is hard to suppose that he hath created us thus desirous of immortality, and thus capable of eternal improvement, unless he intended us

for something more, and something better, than a few years of vanity and vexation.

2. The * evils and calamities of life, which though they have been frequently exaggerated, as grief is querulous, yet are certainly numerous and heavy; and the unequal dispensations of Providence, are to us an earnest of a future state.

We are called and commanded into being, without our own consent, by a superior power; and if this earth were our only habitation, and these few days our all, the miserable part of mankind might with some † reason expostulate with their Creator, and question his goodness, who had forced upon them a being in which they could take no satisfaction. To reply that God is of supreme and irresistible power, and may do as he thinks fit to his creatures, is not

* Herodotus, vii. 46. Hesiod, *Erga* 101. Homer, *Odys.* 2. 129. Pliny, ii. 7. Plautus, *Amphitr.* ii. 12. Diphilus in Stobæus, Euripides, and many others, have treated of this subject; but the evils of life are no where better described than in Æschines, *Dial.* iii. *Περὶ Θανάτου*, p. 92.

† It may be replied, that perhaps men suffer here for faults committed by them in a former state. But, first, the supposition of a former state includes in it the supposition also of a future state. Secondly, it seems not equitable that there should be a state of punishment, which is not attended with a reminiscence of former transgressions; and this affords a strong argument against the doctrine of an antecedent state, and a transmigration of the soul.

a sufficient answer. As it removes none of the pain, and answers none of the desires, so it would satisfy none of the objections of the unhappy. They could never think a Creator to be merciful and wise, who should compel them into a miserable life upon such hard conditions, a life which they would have refused, if it could be conceived possible that they might have had their choice. Many of the Pagans used to say, by way of consolation, If life becomes insupportable, men should not complain, because they are not compelled to bear it, and have the remedy in their hands; the door always stands open, and they may go out when they will. But upon the supposition that there is no future state, the question would still remain, Why were they called in? A question which it is not easy to answer.

They who reject the doctrine of another life, do indeed usually reject along with it the moral attributes of God, and allow him neither goodness, nor equity, nor a regard to the virtues or vices of men; but only suppose him to be endowed with supreme power, and with consummate wisdom, that is to say, wisdom in the contrivance of the universe, and in the distribution of its parts. This is a favourite notion with

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with some of our modern Infidels ; but it is surely a most absurd description of the Deity : for power without goodness is tyranny, and wisdom without goodness is little better than ignorance, and fails in its most essential part.

Again, as to the evils of life, it is not a satisfactory solution to reply, that most of our calamities are to be ascribed to ourselves, and that if we were virtuous we might be happy, at least contented with our condition.

It is true that virtue is always amiable, and commonly convenient ; that vice is always odious, and commonly hurtful. But this is not enough. It seems just, and fit, and regular, that as happiness and goodness are necessarily united in God, so by his appointment they should be united in all other beings. Virtue, which brings us nearer in resemblance to God, should for that very reason be attended with a proportionable degree of happiness ; and vice, which destroys that resemblance, should be united to shame and remorse.

And yet, by an irregular transposition, and an unnatural alliance, virtue is not only attended with misery, but is, not seldom, the very cause of it ; whilst sin sometimes flourishes, and many wicked persons enjoy more worldly

prosperity, and fall into fewer calamities, than many good men. To reconcile which with the perfections of God, we must suppose that there will be a state of retribution.

Man hath received from God reason and liberty, and is accountable for them to him, as to his Creator. From him he must expect approbation, favour, and blessing, if he be obedient; and due correction if he be stubborn and undutiful.

Man is obliged to perform good offices to his fellow-creatures, and hath a right to expect the same returns. This is one of those evident truths which no rational creature can deny. It is therefore fit that they who despise these obligations, and violate this great and plain duty, and by their cunning, by their high station in life, and their extensive power, or by the defect of human laws, escape the punishment which they deserve, should undergo it hereafter; and that they who love their neighbour as themselves, and are friends to mankind, should be rewarded, especially when their good deeds are overlooked, or misrepresented, or repaid with insults and injuries, in this unkind world.

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Man, besides his public behaviour, acts a secret part in his own breast, and doth many things invisibly in imagination and design, which are buried in the mind that gave them birth, and receive for the present no punishment or recompence. Therefore there should be a state in which these good or bad dispositions shall be attended with suitable effects.

It may be urged, that future rewards are unnecessary, because there is none good. The best of men are guilty of so many failings, and are transgressors in so many respects, that they do not merit, and cannot claim of their Maker, as their due, a state of happiness after this; and God would not deal hardly with them, if he gave them no other life than this, and in this such a portion of good and evil mixed together, as time and chance should allot them.

Merit, and a right to demand rewards from God, are odious and insolent expressions. The necessity of future rewards appears not from the goodness of the best men, considered in itself, and tried by the strict laws of justice, but from their comparative goodness in which they greatly surpass others. Thence the certainty of a future state may be collected; for it is not reasonable that he who hath committed fewer faults,

faults, and performed some laudable actions, should fare worse than he who hath been very wicked; that all things should come alike to all; and that the greatest sinners, and they who compared to them may be called righteous, should perish together.

It may also be objected, that future punishments are the less necessary, because all vice is its own punishment, even in this life.

Vice indeed usually draws after it many inconveniences and disorders, many losses and calamities, and constantly deprives men of the superior pleasures which arise from virtue. But vice is not a proper and sufficient punishment to itself in this life, because many wicked men suffer far less here than many virtuous persons. Besides, happiness consists in opinion; he who can think himself happy, is happy; and a sinner in this situation cannot be miserable, though he might have been happier with good dispositions, and though no wise man would change conditions with him.

3. If there were no judgment to come, or no evidence of it, men would want sufficient motives to well-doing, particularly when a steady adherence to righteousness would expose them to sufferings.

It hath been said that since there is an unalterable difference between right and wrong, what is reasonable ought to be preferred by a reasonable creature, whatsoever the consequence may be; that there is a decency, dignity, and beauty in virtue, and that it is eligible for its own sake. All this may be granted; but it must be remembered that man is not all mind, all intellect, and all spirit. He is exposed to bodily pains so sharp and grievous, that whilst they last he must be miserable, though he should make them his choice, and approve his own conduct. He would therefore want a sufficient encouragement to endure such trials, if there were no life besides the present. The only motive, upon that supposition, would be this, that a * rational creature ought not to act in a manner which his reason condemns, and for which he will be reproached perhaps by others, but certainly by his own conscience.

* The force of this motive is extremely well expressed by Juvenal:

—Phalaris licet imperet ut sis

Falsus, et admoto dictet perjuriam tauro,

Summum crede nefas animam præferre pudori,

Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas.

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The fitness and rectitude of such a behaviour is a dusky and a refined kind of truth, which will escape the notice of the bulk of mankind. Some exalted minds might perceive it, and feel it, and act suitably to it; but men in general are no such creatures. They want hopes and fears, they want rewards and punishments, to make them chioose what is right rather than what is agreeable to the senses, and convenient for the present; and virtue, which hath no recommendation besides her own decency, is an object which will hardly raise their affections. And therefore in the Scriptures, which are calculated for common use, you shall find few exhortations to goodness taken from the bare decency of it, but many from the advantages present and future of piety, and from the dreadful misery which follows vice by the just appointment of God.

4. The general consent of men concerning a future state, ought not to be accounted a slight argument in favour of it.

In all ages and places the consciences of men usually bear witness to a future judgment. Their minds are full of disquiet when they have acted against their known duty, though
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at the same time they may think themselves safe from punishment in this life.

On the contrary, good actions repay the virtuous with satisfaction; and something within tells them, that though their present condition be in many respects inconvenient, yet all shall be well at the last, and that there are undiscovered blessings reserved for them in a better world.

5. Lastly, upon the supposition of a future judgment, the present state and course of things, the unequal and promiscuous distribution of good and evil, though it may seem at first sight irregular and unreasonable, is really a wise and a kind administration. Goodness is often not recompensed in this life, and sometimes exposes to many temporal evils. But hereby God hath given to mankind in all ages an intimation and a prospect of another world, hath added strength to those arguments which reason suggests for such expectations, and hath directed us to look forwards and expect a more glorious scene, where the wisdom and goodness, and equity and righteousness, of the Creator and Governor of the world shall be fully justified, and cleared from every objection which the present confused and disorderly state can suggest.

suggest. If goodness had been always immediately and amply rewarded; if length of days had been always in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour; righteous men who lived before the coming of Christ, and the more express revelation of eternal life, might have been inclined to fear that they had received their reward, especially when they considered their own imperfections and offences. To which we may add, that such an uninterrupted flow of prosperity might have made them too fond of this world, and too unwilling to leave it.

But indeed these large promises of temporal blessings contained in the Old Testament were found liable to so many limitations and exceptions, that wise and good men must have discerned that they were to be understood as frequently but not constantly made good; and must have drawn the obvious inference, that all present failures of this kind would be compensated hereafter.

The best persons often suffer in this world; but if by those transitory sufferings they improve their better part, and for the sake of them shall receive a greater reward, happy are the evil days which produce effects so desirable.

Vice

Vice sometimes escapes here with impunity, and is attended with conveniences, and with the pleasures of sense. But in this there is nothing unreasonable; for if sin were always instantly and duly chastised, if it infallibly produced sudden pain of body, and anguish of mind, and want, and scorn, and reproach, and infamy; if these were its sure and unavoidable companions, who would be wicked? or perhaps rather, how few would be good? For to abstain from evil by mere * compulsion, and that we may escape instant misery, seems not to deserve the honourable name of virtue.

Though vice is sometimes united to temporal prosperity, and virtue attended with inconveniences, through the perverseness of men, yet these are not, and indeed they ought not to be, the natural and regular effects which they produce; for if every good man certainly knew that he must undergo perpetual disappointments, pains, calamities, and ill usage, and if every wicked man might as certainly conclude that he should meet with constant success, and gratify all his desires, the temptations to wickedness would be too strong, and the dis-

* Εἰ τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἐνθὺς ἡκολούθουν αἱ δίκαι, οὐδὲν διακρίνομεν αὐτῶν ὅτι αἱ εἰσὶν ἀγαθὰ. Sallustius philosophus.

couragements from piety too violent. And therefore the course of things is so ordered, that righteousness is generally profitable to all things, and wickedness usually hurts both the body and the mind, and brings more uneasiness than pleasure.

These are the ordinary effects of moral good and evil; to which we must add, that there have been instances of wicked men, who seemed to have secured themselves from vengeance, and yet have been punished in so wonderful a manner, and of good men who beyond all expectation have been so signally delivered and rewarded, that the world hath acknowledged something divine in it, and ascribed it to an over-ruling Providence.

These are the arguments by which the doctrine of a future state is confirmed; but these are not all, and to them are to be added two other proofs.

The first is taken from the nature of the soul itself, which upon the most careful enquiry, and upon the best judgment that we can form, seems to be a substance active, simple, uncompounded; so that no external enemy, no impression of the surrounding elements, none but He who made it, can destroy it.

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The second proof, which with Christians ought to weigh more than all the rest, is taken from the express testimony of the Gospel; so that every thing that confirms the truth of our religion, assures us at the same time of a future state.

The numerous passages in the New Testament relating to the day of judgment, to the manner in which that judgment shall be executed, to the enquiry which shall be made into our behaviour, and to the subsequent state of happiness or misery, contain without question things which are to be literally understood, and things mixed with them which are figurative, or spoken in condescension to our capacities. It is not easy to separate accurately the one from the other, nor doth it concern us to distinguish them exactly, since this clear and important truth is contained in them all, that every one shall finally receive according to his works.

The inference from which is as plain as it is important, that we should live as it becomes those who must give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds.

Therefore, Let us not delude ourselves with foolish hopes that God will receive us into happiness,

piners, though we perform not the conditions which he requires.

Let us not delay our reformation to an uncertain time. If our task remains unfinished, a long night succeeds, and after it comes a day of retribution.

Let us reverence our conscience, and do no violence to it. God hath established it as a judge within us, a judge in some respects like himself, a judge whom usually we cannot deceive, and from whose presence we cannot fly.

Let us not set our affections on unlawful objects, or too immoderately love any of the things which are earthly and transitory, and for the sake of the one or the other neglect our duty and our eternal welfare. We must soon go hence, and leave all these follies and vanities; and when we arise again, it will be to behold a quite different scene. Sinners will then see no more that world which they have so much loved, or will see it only for a moment; it will consume away before the presence of the Lord; and nothing will be left that can give any pleasure, or comfort, or relief to a wicked mind.

Let us not value ourselves on account of any temporal advantages, nor despise nor insult those

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those who are placed beneath us. These distinctions are of a very short continuance: a day is coming when they shall cease and be forgotten for ever. Death and judgment set all upon the level. All must lie down undistinguished in the dust, and all must arise and give account of their works to Him who is no respecter of persons, and who regards no other difference than that which ariseth from virtue and from vice.

Let us so live, that we may be able to reap the present benefit which every good person will certainly find from the belief of a future state. Peace and patience, and resignation and contentment must dwell in every mind that hopes and expects everlasting happiness.

These are great and immediate rewards which faith would secure to us if our behaviour were suitable to our profession; but because it is not, the thought of a future judgment carries with it more terror than consolation; the soul startles at it, and puts the important question to itself, What shall be thy portion in that day?

There is a religious fear which is the beginning of wisdom, and the parent of virtue. If

the thought of a future judgment awaken in us this fear, happy is it for us: diligence in well-doing will accompany it, and peace and hope will follow in due time.

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S E R M O N V.

ECCLES. V. 1.

Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil.

THIS first verse, and the four following ones, contain instructions concerning our duty and behaviour in the public worship of God, and concerning the religious vows which we make to him. I shall explain them, and then add some remarks upon them.

What Solomon calls, the House of God, is a place appointed for the worship and service of God. To erect and set apart such places for the exercise of religious rites, is derived from the dictates of human nature, and approved of God from the remotest antiquity. It began not with the Tabernacle which Moses by divine appointment caused to be made, but was much

more ancient. Noah built an altar when he came out of the ark. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, wheresoever they pitched their tents, had places for divine worship, that is, altars with their inclosures, though they had no express command from God, that we know of concerning it. Moses, before the Ark was made, and that Tabernacle which God appointed, erected a tabernacle for the same purpose without the camp, where every one who sought the Lord was to go. And all this seems to have been done as a thing of custom, and as men by tradition had learned to appropriate some particular place for the more solemn worship of God. Concerning places thus sanctified and set apart, God thus speaks to Moses: In all places where I record my name I will come and bless thee; that is, in every place where the remembrance or memorial of my name shall be, and which I have appointed for the performance of religious acts and duties, there will I come to thee and bless thee. And accordingly the tabernacle of the Lord is called, The tabernacle of meeting, not only because men met there together to worship God, but because God condescended to come and meet them. The Old Testament abounds with

with instances of God's manifesting his presence and his glory in the Tabernacle, and in the Temple ; and it is needless to cite them.

This consecration of particular places, and the performance of particular rites, which were not to be solemnized elsewhere, was of singular use in those ruder ages, both as an help to excite reverence and devotion, and as well adapted to preserve the posterity of Abraham from Idolatry.

Our Saviour, who brought into the world a brighter light and a sublimer religion, taught that it mattered not where God was worshipped, if he were worshipped in spirit and in truth ; that of all temples a pure heart was that which he most approved, and that where two or three of his disciples should meet together to serve God, there would he spiritually be in the midst of them ; doctrines agreeable to reason, and suitable to the ensuing times, when Christians should be so far from enjoying splendid temples to repair to, that they often would hardly have a place where to hide their heads. As soon indeed as persecution declined, and a calm succeeded, Christians built themselves Churches, and ever since have set apart such edifices for public worship ; which is very right, so long

as we remember that it is only for conveniency and decency.

* When thou goest to the house of God, says Solomon, keep thy foot.

In these words there is an allusion to a custom of taking off the shoes, which was practised by the Jews and by other nations of the East, when they entered their temples and sacred places. Concerning this ancient custom, the Lord himself spake to Moses, and afterwards to Joshua; Put off thy shoes from thy feet; for the place where thou standest is holy ground. Therefore the meaning of Solomon's direction is this; Take heed to thyself, that thou act with decency and reverence in the house of God, bearing in mind into whose presence thou comest; and so it relates to the outward and bodily worship which is due to God. For God is the maker of our bodies as well as of our souls, and therefore we ought to serve him with both. As the outward worship without the inward is dead; so the inward without the other is not complete, is not the service of the whole man. Bodily worship, indeed, being considered in itself, is one of the lesser things of the Law, and the honour done thereby to

* See a Discourse of Joseph Mede on this text.

God

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God is of no great value and esteem in his sight; and yet a voluntary and scornful and presumptuous neglect even of so small a duty may be no small sin, because such a neglect must proceed from a profane and hardened heart. For a sin is not always to be estimated according to the value of the duty omitted, but from the disposition of mind causing us to neglect it.

When thou art in the house of God, says Solomon, be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil.

Now, to hear, as every one knows, hath two senses, a natural and a figurative sense. To hear, in the natural or literal sense, is to attend to and to perceive what is said: to hear, in the figurative sense, or to hearken, is to obey. If we take the word in the first sense, it may be thus explained: Part of the service of the Temple, as it was instituted by David, Solomon's father, consisted in Psalms and Hymns, which were sung by the Levites. When thou comest to the Temple, says Solomon, be attentive to the praises of God which are sung there, and to the prayers which are offered to him, and join in celebrating and invoking thy Creator, which is a better service than offer-

ing up sacrifices to him. The second sense, according to which to hear is to obey, amounts nearly to the same effect. The meaning then is; When thou comest to the Temple, bring with thee a religious mind, which is better than bringing sheep and oxen for a sacrifice. Return thanks to God for his mercies, implore his pardon for thy offences, acknowledge thy sins, pray to him for his assistance, and resolve to obey for the future. This is much better than any sacrifice, and infinitely better than the sacrifice of fools.

By the sacrifice of fools must be understood sacrifice offered by persons who persist in a wicked life, or who place too great a trust in sacrifice, as if it would be accepted of God instead of obedience, or who prefer the ceremonial to the moral Law.

Thus the direction given by Solomon agrees with that proverbial saying in Scripture; Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Though sacrifices were appointed by the Law, yet the Prophets speak of them sometimes in a slighting and disparaging manner, as if God neither ordered nor approved them; which

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which seeming contradiction may be thus removed.

First, according to the style of the Hebrew language, things are forbidden or rejected absolutely, which are only meant comparatively with something else. So that when it is said that God desires not and approves not sacrifices, but goodness and righteousness, the meaning is, that he prefers these to sacrifice.

Secondly, God seems not to have commanded sacrifice as a thing of its own nature right and fit, but only as useful or needful by consequence. It was usually a rite by which men renewed a covenant with God, and it supposed some transgressions. So that if men had never sinned, it would perhaps have had no place.

When God accepted it, he approved it only as it was a testimony of contrition, an humble acknowledgment of unworthiness, a desire to honour him with a present, and to be received again into favour and alliance with him.

Hence it is that God rejected and abhorred all oblations where there was no purpose of amendment, no intention to keep his commandments; he would not allow them to be ordinances of his, when thus perverted and abused.

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The house of God at Jerusalem was an house of sacrifice, which they, who came thither to worship, offered to God, to make way for their prayers, and to find favour in his sight. Solomon therefore gives them a caution not to place religion only or chiefly in the external rite, but principally in their readiness to hear and keep the commandments of God, without which that rite alone would profit them nothing, but be no better than the sacrifice of fools, who, when they do evil, think they do well. For without this readiness to obey, this purpose of heart to live according to his will, God accepts of no sacrifice from those who approach him, nor will pardon their transgressions. He therefore who makes no conscience of offending God, and yet thinks to atone for it by gifts and offerings, is an ignorant and a wicked fool, how wise and how religious soever he may think himself. The reason is, because God requires obedience in the first place, and absolutely; but sacrifice only consequently, and even then not chiefly, and for itself, but only as it is a real sign, and a true testimony of contrition.

After this introduction, Solomon proceeds to give some directions concerning prayer, and says,

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Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few.

That is; When thou art going to pray to God, recollect thyself; consider that thy Creator is great and good and wise above all, and that thou art a poor dependent mortal being, an inhabitant of this lower world; weigh thy expressions; think before thou speakest, and take heed to use few words, and to ask for nothing improper.

Thus said the Wise Man; and a greater than he, even Divine Wisdom itself, hath confirmed this advice; for our Lord hath given us the same direction concerning prayer.

For a dream cometh, says Solomon, through the multitude of business, and a fool's voice is known through a multitude of words.

The sense may perhaps be this: In our prayers to God, as in our conversation with men, a profusion of words often ariseth from want of judgment, respect, discretion, and decency. The prayer of such a person is like the dream of one who hath been oppressed with a multitude of business; all confusion, jumble, and incoherence. Such senseless and impertinent

pertinent petitions cannot be acceptable to God.

Then Solomon proceeds to give some prudent cautions concerning vows. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow, and not pay. The words are sufficiently plain, and it is no less plain, that upon the whole they rather discourage than recommend the practice of vowing.

The custom of making vows to God seems, as to antiquity, to have been almost as old as mankind; and as to extent, to have been practised by all nations, and entered into all religions.

Nor is this to be wondered at, since it hath its foundation in the nature of man, in his desires and fears, which when they are strong will usually get the better of right reason. For of all practices which stand not condemned in Revelation, and which by indulgence have been permitted to men, there are hardly any more injudicious than the making of vows, and in behalf of which less can be offered; so that, at least, under the Christian dispensation and the

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the light of the Gospel, they ought to have been totally discarded.

In the Old Testament we find mention of vows made by Abraham, Jacob, and others, before the giving of the Law, and it seems to have been a thing which men fell into of their own accord, and which God, as he did not command, so neither did he forbid and disallow.

It is observable, that from the beginning when God revealed himself to men, he did it in a manner accommodated to the infirmities of men, and to the greater or lesser degrees of their knowledge. So that the holy Scriptures of the Old Testament are a perpetual proof of this divine condescension. When he conversed with men, he did it after the manner of men, and he suffered them to behave themselves in some measure towards him as they did towards each other; he suffered them to reason, to interrogate, to complain, to expostulate, and to make covenants with him.

As to vows, they seem to have been a kind of compact or bargain which men made with God. When they desired or feared something greatly, they declared, that if God would do so or so for them, they in return would give him
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this or that thing, or perform this or that action in honour to him.

There were some conditions requisite to a vow, to make it in any sense a religious act; these for instance: What was asked of God, must have been what was harmless, innocent, and lawful, what might be fairly desired, and honestly enjoyed: and likewise what a man promised must have been something that he might lawfully give, and that he was not before obliged to perform by any law. Without these conditions, vows would have been childish and frivolous, and in some cases little better than affronts and abominations.

At the best, they seem to have been mixed with imperfect notions of the Deity, as if by promises and offerings he might be induced to grant what else he would withhold, according to the Pagan notion, that a gift had power with Gods and men, and would prevail when prayers and intreaties were ineffectual.

And yet it is plain that God permitted good men to act thus in days of old, partly in condescension to their apprehensions, to their weaknesses, and to common practice; and partly for the sake of some good effects arising from this intercourse and covenant which men made and

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entertained with him. It kept up in their minds a firm belief of the presence, the power, and the clemency of God, and of his over-ruling providence, and was a fence against profaneness, irreligion, atheism, and idolatry; so that the benefit arising from it seemed to be a compensation for all that was imperfect and injudicious in such a behaviour.

In the Law of Moses, vows are never commanded, but they are often mentioned as actions to which the people had been accustomed of old, and some directions are laid down concerning them; and to prevent some inconveniences which might arise from an indiscreet use of them, a permission is granted to a father and to an husband, to annul vows made by a daughter or by a wife.

In the Book of Judges there is a particular account of Jephtha's rash vow, and of his unwilling performance of it, as it were on purpose to deter men from binding themselves under such imprudent obligations. It is not to be supposed that he offered up his daughter as a sacrifice, but rather that she was doomed to an unmarried state and to perpetual servitude in the Tabernacle of God, which was very disagreeable to her father and to herself, and a cause of great sorrow.

sorrow to both. The same practice was common amongst the * Gentiles, of devoting persons to the service of their Deities and Temples.

In the writings of the Prophets there are no exhortations to make vows, but only to fulfil them when they were made, and not to mock God by promising and not performing.

According to † Philo, an ancient and celebrated Jewish writer, if a father, a husband, or a king, vowed any thing that might be very grievous and detrimental, or even dangerous and destructive to his children, his wife, his servants, his subjects, they were indispensably obliged to perform it, and to submit to it. This was establishing a complete form of oppression and tyranny both public and domestic, and treating rational creatures like brutes; as if a man's family stood in the same rank with his ox or his ass.

Even in the Old Testament, it should be observed, that some of the § vows, whereof

* See Euripides *Phœniss.* 210.

† Ἐὰν ἰσχυρίσῃ τροφῆς γυναικὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ ἵματι, τροφῆς ἀσχεῖται. Ἐὰν πατὴρ υἱῷ, ἢ ἀδελφῷ τῷ ὀνησέον, ταυτὸν. Si vir uxoris suæ alimenta Deo sacra esse voluerit, alimentis ei suis abstinendum. Si de filio pater, si princeps de subditis simile quiddam statuerit, fixum idem habendum ac ratum. Vide Eusebium, *Præp. Evang.* viii. p. 338.

§ S. Clarke, *Serm.* CLXVI.

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mention is made, were not strictly and properly vows, but only serious and solemn resolutions of gratitude and of general obedience, that is, of duties which men were obliged to observe, whether they vowed, or vowed not.

It is also a * saying of some Jewish Doctors, that vows for the most part proceeded from some evil principle; and therefore they advise those who would consult the quiet of their minds to be very cautious in making them.

Our Saviour, as far as it appears from the New Testament, never made a vow himself; nor did he ever give any precept concerning vows. The same is true of the Apostles; and if St. Paul bound himself once by a vow, as he is thought to have done, it was probably in condescension to the Jews, to whom as he says he became a Jew, and with whom he was willing to comply in any thing that was not unlawful, and immoral.

When Christianity was once well established, it might have been expected that these vows, together with all that was Jewish and ceremonial, would have ceased. But the spirit of bigotry, fanaticism, and superstition soon began to operate, and at last was poured out like a

* Stillingfleet, *Miscell. Diss.* p. 12.

torrent, till the Christian world was over-run with Monks and Monkish devotion. The Church of Rome hath a singular art of separating the chaff from the wheat; and then she gathers the chaff into the Ecclesiastical garner, and throws the wheat away. By a perverse choice she retains what was bad, or weak and exceptionable in the preceding ages of Christianity, and rejects very often what ought to have been preserved. She applauds and recommends and enforces religious vows and engagements, by which superstitious persons bind themselves to pay a blind obedience to the precepts of men, to practise uncommanded austerities, to live single and solitary lives, and to have no possessions.

Now let it be supposed that the things thus vowed are good and commendable, which is more than can be granted, yet it is wiser to stand fast in the liberty which God hath given us, and to do such actions, freely and unconstrained; for then we can do them with a better grace and with a better will; whilst oaths and vows are a snare to us, and an occasion of sin and sorrow, if either we neglect them, or perform them with reluctance. The religion of Christ, as it is laid down in the New Testament,

ment, is such, that we need not aspire to any thing beyond it; and happy is he who can in a tolerable degree conform his practice to it. Let him do that first, before he thinks of super-adding will-worship, and excelling his rule.

Father Paul, who was himself of a Religious Order in the Church of Rome, and who was an honour to his Order, hath delivered his opinion fairly and freely upon this subject, without valuing the censures of the zealots of his own communion. He declares his disapprobation of religious vows, and of a Monastic life. He says that such persons solemnly promise that they will observe a multitude of voluntary, unrequired, unnecessary things, without considering how a change of temper, and how human weakness may operate, and without well weighing what is practicable and possible. Thus uncalled and unforced they throw themselves into temptation, and often contract the guilt of perjury, and commit faults which in another state of life they might have avoided.

These are some of the corruptions which Protestants have observed and censured in the Romish Communion. It is to be wished that Protestant States were themselves altogether free from the same blemishes, and from any

defects of a like kind, and in particular, that public oaths and solemn declarations were more sparingly required. What good ariseth from multiplying such impositions, it is not easy to prove; what evil ariseth from them it is easy to discern.

Since religious vows are not common amongst us, the less need be said by way of caution against them; but it becomes us likewise to beware of every thing that bears any affinity to vows in our conduct towards God and towards men. Pious resolution, and prayer to God for his assistance, and a sense of human frailty, and a distrust of ourselves, these are dispositions which best suit a Christian; and to this nothing should be added by way of promise concerning a future behaviour. We know that St. Peter was too forward in making large protestations, and that his heart failed him when he came to the trial. Instead of making new vows, let us take heed to keep that which we formerly made, namely the baptismal vow. In our transactions also with men, oaths, and covenants, and bonds, and suretyships, and solemn engagements, and protestations, and promises, are things to be well weighed, and entered into with serious deliberation. In matters of consequence,

sequence, a man should think an hour before he speaks, and a week before he promises. Sufficient to the day is the sorrow thereof. Causes of uneasiness will arise in human life as naturally as the sparks fly upward; and there is no occasion to add to them by indiscretion; by laying ourselves under obligations which we cannot accomplish, we shall make ourselves enemies, and lose our friends, our credit, and the peace of our mind. David describing a righteous person, says of him amongst other things; He sweareth unto his neighbour, and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hinderance. Promises are sacred, and religion, honour, reputation require that they be observed; and doubtless he who sweareth to his neighbour, and disappointeth him, is a contemptible and an infamous man. But a person who is both righteous and wise, is one who never swears to his neighbour when he can lawfully avoid it, and keeps himself free from temptations to perjury. He can scarcely break his promise, because he seldom makes any promise, and never unless upon conditions which he knows he can fulfil; he chooseth to be better than his word, and to perform more than was expected from him.

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S E R M O N VI.

ACTS xvii. 11.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

THE Jews of Berea are here commended by St. Luke for examining and embracing the doctrines propounded to them. St. Paul, who preached the Gospel to them, was hated by the greater part of the Jews, his brethren and theirs, as an apostate, as one who taught false doctrines which he had once violently opposed. He had been persecuted by the Jews of Damascus, of Jerusalem, of Antioch, of Iconium, of Lystra, of Thessalonica. These transactions could hardly be unknown to the Jews of Berea; and yet they shewed no prejudices against his doctrine upon that account, but were willing to give him a hearing.

hearing, and received the word with all readiness of mind. On the other hand, though probably they were not ignorant of the success of the Gospel, and of the report concerning the wonderful works wrought by Christ and his Apostles in confirmation of it, yet as St. Paul undertook to reason with them out of the Scriptures, they on their part thought that they had a right to examine his proofs. They searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. This their prudent conduct in receiving the Christian religion with docility and readiness, yet not without due inquiry and consideration, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles hath recorded to their praise, that wheresoever the Gospel should be preached in the whole world, this also that they had done should be told for a memorial of them, and for an example to others.

St. Peter advises Christians to be ready to give an answer to every man who asketh them a reason of the hope which is in them; by which words seems to be meant, not only that Christians by their exemplary lives should justify themselves from the imputation of evil-doing, but that they should also be ready, and consequently able to give some account why
they

they were the servants of Christ, and to shew that they had just reason for their behaviour, and for their faith.

In many places of the New Testament, the word faith means the whole duty of a Christian, all that he is to believe, and all that he is to do. Thus it is said that they who believe in Christ shall receive remission of sins, shall be justified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life; where faith or belief in Christ is both a belief and an obedience,

But if we consider faith, in itself, it is a belief of the revelation which God hath made to us by his Son, entertained upon just grounds.

It is a belief that God sent his Son into the world to save and instruct us; it is a belief that the doctrines taught by our Lord are true; it is a belief that we ought to practise what he requires from us, the substance of which is that we must live soberly, righteously, and godly, because there is a time appointed when he will judge mankind, and reward his servants. As the motives to religion arise principally from things future and invisible, faith is therefore said to be the substance, or well-grounded expectation of things not seen.

Faith

Faith is not only, first, a belief of these things, but it is, secondly, a belief of them entertained upon sufficient evidence.

For if we assent without a reason, this cannot properly be called faith. It is rather credulity or prejudice, or positiveness; and if we believe what is true, it is by chance.

Such an imperfect faith, which though it have a right object, hath no foundation, will probably be unsteadfast, and unfruitful, or productive of nothing that is good.

Such a belief cannot be acceptable to God, who requires to be served, not only by the lips, but by the understanding. He gave us an understanding, and he expects that we should use it. When therefore any thing is proposed to our assent, as coming from him, we dishonour the abilities which he hath conferred upon us, if we believe without an inquiry whether he be the author of such a revelation.

Thus faith is a belief of the revelation which God hath made to us by his Son, entertained upon just grounds. And this belief may be said to be entertained upon just grounds, when we know what that revelation requires from us, and when we have sufficient evidence that it is a divine revelation,

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But it may be asked : If faith be little better than presumption and confidence and credulity, unless it be established upon the grounds above-mentioned, how shall the common people, the bulk of mankind, who have neither leisure, nor opportunities, nor abilities, inquire into all this ?

This is a question of importance, and the proper answer to it seems to be this :

To whomsoever little is given, from them little is required. They can only examine to the best of their abilities ; and serious consideration and upright intentions will certainly suffice. But besides this, be pleased to reflect upon the following observations, observations founded upon reason, truth, and plain matter of fact.

* Amongst those who stand lowest in rank, in knowledge and genius, and who could never apply themselves to close study and to deep reflection, there are many who are blessed with honest dispositions and an upright heart. The things relating to religion which concern such persons are so few, so clear, and so reasonable, that they enter into their mind as easily as light into the eye. They admire and embrace

* Le Clerc *De L' Incredulité*, P. II. ch. i.

the truths of the Gospel at the first hearing, though they are not able perhaps to dress their thoughts in proper expressions, and to give a clear account of their sentiments. There is a simplicity, a majesty, and a beauty in the precepts of the Gospel, in Christian morality, which wins their affection, and commands their respect; and as they see nothing in the doctrines which offends their notions, or crosses their innocent views, they receive them with submission and a full acquiescence of mind. It is certain that the disposition and the conduct of these persons is praiseworthy, and that many great men and subtle reasoners are not near so wise as these are, in the true and religious sense of the word.

Every person when he searches the Scriptures, that he may learn his duty, ought to separate what is plain and easy from that which is intricate and obscure, and to conclude that these plainer things are his principal concern. No parts of Scripture can, strictly speaking, be objects of our faith, so long as we cannot find out their meaning. Thus much we ought to believe concerning them, That they contain truths which we cannot discover. This is implicit

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implicit faith, in a good sense of the word, and a very reasonable duty.

Concerning the assurance which every one may have of the truth of his religion, the case stands thus :

When the disciples of Christ preached the Gospel, multitudes of different nations, religions, ages, and professions, attending to this doctrine, and observing that it was pure and reasonable, and supported by many miracles, embraced the Christian religion. The faith of these first converts was founded upon the excellence of Christianity, and upon the wonderful works by which it was confirmed, and which they had seen.

The evidence which we now have of the truth of our religion is somewhat altered. It consists partly upon the goodness of its precepts, and the importance of its doctrines ; and partly, not indeed upon the evidence of sense, but upon the testimony of numerous and most unexceptionable witnesses who had such evidence.

The Apostles wrought kind and beneficial miracles, taught men to repent, to live good lives, to love and obey God, to love and assist one another, to expect a state of retribution ;

and they wrote treatises and epistles for the instruction of their brethren.

The first Christians, quitting the strong prejudices of education, and every worldly interest, received this religion so taught and so confirmed, wrought some miracles themselves, received extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, suffered cruel persecution for the sake of the Gospel, lived virtuously, delivered down these important truths to their children and successors, not by word of mouth only, but by leaving copies of the New Testament, which soon translated into various languages, and read in all churches, and studied and revered by Christians from age to age, have been transmitted to us.

Thus our evidence for the Christian religion ariseth partly from the testimony of the most credible witnesses, and is founded upon the concurring authority of multitudes, whom we have no reasonable cause of suspecting.

The argument for the truth of the Christian religion, which is taken from its excellence and importance, is not only adapted to every capacity, but is wonderfully persuasive and full of conviction. The more it is examined, and the nearer it is viewed, the greater is its lustre, and

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and the fairer its appearance. The doctrines of the Gospel will ever be found amiable, useful, and necessary, tending to compose our passions, to improve our minds, to make us obedient to God, good magistrates, good subjects, good friends, good parents, good children, and serviceable to all in our several stations.

The Gospel discovers to us what human unassisted Reason could never have discerned; it promiseth more than we ever could have expected; and it alarms us with those just fears of God's displeasure, which together with pious hopes, are the mainsprings of action, and incentives to well-doing. A religion thus intrinsically excellent, and thus supported, ought to be received with thankfulness, and held fast without wavering. To doubt of it is folly: to reject it is madness.

To these grounds of our Christian faith is to be added the completion of a great variety of prophecies contained both in the Old and in the New Testament, of which several are very clear and circumstantial; and the event, which is the great unfold of predictions, hath sufficiently explained them to us; and when they are considered as a system or chain of prophecies, as all tending to one and the same end, they

they give strength and light to each other, and the argument built upon them acquires more weight and stability.

There is another proof of the truth of Christianity which hath been urged by several good and well-meaning men, and it is this, that when pious persons meditate upon the holy Scriptures, an assurance ariseth in them that these Scriptures are the word of God; which assurance proceeds from the influence of the holy Spirit of God upon their minds.

If I treat this proof as defective, it shall not be with any harsh censure or contempt thrown either upon it, or upon those who embrace it. But, all things duly considered, the case seems to stand thus:

The ordinary influences of the holy Spirit upon well-disposed persons are supposed to be promised in the Scriptures. But whether a Christian can feel and discern them from the workings of his own mind, he himself must determine. The best and wisest men have acknowledged that they felt no such impulse overbearing and over-ruling their natural faculties; and so have concluded, that the divine assistance concurs in such a silent and feeble manner with the human abilities and with the

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man reason, and with the operations of the human mind, as not to be distinguishable from them. So then, the proof above-mentioned, which may be called, the inward voice or testimony of the Spirit, unless it be accompanied with visible, external, and miraculous proofs, can convince no by-stander, none except the person who feels it. And how, I pray, shall we know whether that person is not under a delusion? If he who makes such pretensions to the Spirit, either acts dishonestly, or reasons childishly, all wise men will conclude either that he intends to impose upon others, or that he is imposed upon himself by his own weak head and warm imagination.

Thus far we have considered faith, as a belief founded upon good grounds. To this we must add, that it is a belief producing good works.

For if upon an impartial inquiry and sufficient evidence we are convinced of the truth of our religion; if we receive the precepts of Christianity, not as a burden, but as a blessing and a favour, and account our duty to be a reasonable service; if we believe what is revealed to us concerning the invaluable rewards annexed to our obedience, and the dreadful misery which shall be the punishment of obstinate wickedness;

if we think the approbation of God to be more desirable than all the unlawful or all the lawful pleasures of this world, and a perseverance in well-doing the only way to obtain it; if faith be the confident expectation of good things not seen; if it makes our future recompense appear certain, and as it were placed before our eyes, it seems to be a just inference that faith and disobedience can never dwell together.

True it is that man is an inconsistent creature, whose heart and understanding are often at variance, who frequently suffers his inclinations to get the better of his reason, who approves one thing, and doth another, and who consequently may have faith, or something very like faith, and yet act contrary to it.

A distinction must therefore be made between faith as it is a bare assent, and as it is a Christian virtue acceptable to God. There is a faith, which is only an habitual and historical belief of religion, a faith which dwells in the memory or understanding, but hath no influence on the heart. They in whom this faith is found, disbelieve not the Gospel, nor call it in question: they assent to it, as they assent to many other facts and truths upon which they never meditate and reflect. There is a faith which

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which is an active faith, which embraces and receives God's revealed will, the affirmations, the promises, the threats, and the commands contained in it, assenting to the affirmations and doctrines, depending upon the promises, fearing the threatenings with a religious awe, and resolving sincerely to obey the commandments. This faith is not separable from good works: the former may have a place in the most vicious and corrupted minds.

I shall add some inferences and remarks.

1. Since faith is founded upon a knowledge of God's revealed will, every person hath a right to examine the Scriptures, and to determine for himself.

This indeed will make every man a judge of his religion, and of the doctrine of his teachers, which is said by many to be a pernicious liberty, producing errors and heresies: and the same may be said of all God's blessings, and of all our powers and abilities, namely, that they may be abused and misapplied; and therefore such objections are not just.

2. Since faith is founded upon a knowledge of God's revealed will, every Christian is obliged, according to his abilities and opportunities, to acquaint himself with his duty, and to

use all the helps which God vouchsafes to him, such as a knowledge of the Scriptures, prayers to God, a careful shunning of evil, and of acting against his own conscience, an attendance upon the public worship of God, a benevolent and charitable disposition, humility, and a due sense of his own offences and unworthiness, repentance, faith, and a sober and serious temper. If a man will not act thus, how can he expect the blessing of God, and the divine assistance?

3. Since it is the duty and the privilege of every one thus to inquire and determine for himself, and since in so doing he may fall into great mistakes, the general causes of error should be well considered and carefully avoided. These we shall find to be prejudice, or pride, or hastiness of determining, or a neglect and unconcern for religion, or all sin in general.

Prejudice is a judgment which the mind passeth upon a subject before it has received due information, or whilst it is partially inclined to one side of the question. That in all our inquiries we should divest ourselves of prejudice, is commonly acknowledged. But who is intirely free from prejudice? Very few, to be sure. There are many differences of opinion amongst Christians;

Christians; and in these differences there must be error on one side or other, as when in casting up a sum by different persons, different numbers are produced. But certainly favourable allowances are to be made for the prejudices of good persons, for such prejudices as arise from the prevailing force of education, from a modest distrust of their own understanding, from the example and authority of those of whose abilities and integrity they have a high opinion. Mistakes arising from such causes are often almost irresistible, and so far pardonable. But such prejudices as arise from vice are intirely different and inexcusable.

Pride is certainly another cause of error. It leads to singularity, and singularity seldom leads to truth in points of morality. Pride makes us love the praise of men more than the praise of God, and see things, not as they really are, but as our turbulent passions, our ambitious views, and our worldly interests represent them. Pride makes men infallible in their own opinion, and therefore liable to more and worse mistakes than humble and diffident persons.

Hastiness of determining is another cause for which we stray from truth, a cause arising from the small esteem which some entertain of religion,

ligion. When they condescend to make any inquiries about it, they do it in a careless, impatient manner, and are led away by every deceitful argument that lays hold of them in reading or in conversation. They find difficulties in revelation which they cannot fully clear up, and thence they make a weak conclusion, that it is false. And this probably will terminate in atheism, because natural religion also hath its difficulties and obscurities. It had been well for several persons, if they had shunned the reading of irreligious books, and the conversation of profane companions. By impious doubts and scoffs, dressed up in a plausible manner, and seasoned with vivacity and impudence, many have received an incurable wound, and departed from the right way, and never found it more.

Vice is another cause of error. It would be uncharitable and cruel to suppose that every mistake in religion proceeds from the will, and is a proof of a wicked mind. And yet it is a sad and undoubted truth that vice is constantly accompanied with error, and that there never was an habitual sinner who had not something wrong in his notions of religion. How in the nature of things should it be otherwise? Vice
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inflames the passions, and disturbs the understanding, and sinks and debases the mind, and fixes it upon low and mean objects, and takes from it the love of truth and right. It makes men wish that there were no differences between good and evil, no God, no providence, no future punishment of wickedness. And in what can this end, except in false opinions concerning God and morality? That such must be the effects of an irregular life reason assures, and experience testifies, and the word of God plainly and frequently affirms.

From these causes of error we should free ourselves, and inquire into our duty with a love of truth, with a mind humble and desirous of receiving instruction, and cautious not to be deceived by itself or by others, with prayers to God to direct us, and with a sincere resolution to serve him, and to perform all that he requires from us.

If we proceed thus, we may be certain of success; for nothing is more evident than that a person carefully endeavouring to inform himself of his duty, and using the means which God hath afforded him, and doing nothing that his conscience condemns, shall find out all that is necessary for him to know. To this also the

Scriptures agree, containing great and clear promises to those who purify their minds from evil affections, and seriously apply themselves to the study of divine truths: whence this favourable conclusion may be drawn, that if any person be good, he shall be wise, wise so far as it concerns his salvation, and secured from every thing that leads to perdition.

4. Since faith is a well-grounded belief producing obedience, it follows that it is a vain notion of faith to suppose it to consist entirely in a confident reliance upon the merits of Christ, and in a persuasion that God hath fastened his love upon our very persons, without any consideration of our dispositions and qualifications; and that by such a faith as this we are justified.

If this were true, such a faith would most certainly be the greatest of all Christian accomplishments: but St. Paul will not let us say so; for he positively affirms that charity is greater than faith; and therefore a Christian is more likely to be justified by charity than by faith, faith considered abstractedly from good works.

Justification, in few words and in plain words, means the same thing as being acquitted and accepted of God, and being in his favour,

favour. And how are we justified? We are justified by faith, and not by works, saith St. Paul: we are justified by works, and not by faith, saith St. James. Yet these two Apostles require of us the same thing, namely, a religious belief and trust, accompanied with a sincere though imperfect obedience. St. Paul calls it faith, as it is a belief producing obedience; and St. James calls it works, as it is an obedience proceeding from belief. The works which St. Paul rejects are the works of the Jewish Law, or perhaps any works relied upon as perfect and meritorious in themselves. The faith which St. James rejects, is the faith of the Devil, who believes a God, but fears him and hates him, and the faith of any man who holds that a bare assent to the Gospel is sufficient, without morality and common honesty.

5. Faith, in some sense, is a moral virtue, as it is an act of the will. If it were a bare act of the understanding, it would be the less commendable. It can scarcely be accounted a virtue to believe what seems so evident to us that we cannot reject it. But he who possesseth that faith which the Gospel requires, hath first desired to know the will of God, and resolved to obey it; he hath inquired into it carefully,

fully, and as far as his abilities and circumstances would permit. His diligence therefore, and love of truth, and caution, and serious meditation, and good intention, cause his faith not improperly to be accounted a virtue. And this shews the unreasonableness of separating true Christian faith from Christian works, because even Faith itself is a good work, and an act of obedience.

Besides, in the Scriptures, faith in God, or believing in God, often means, trusting in God; and indeed trusting in God is usually implied in the word, faith. Now to trust in God's promises is undoubtedly a moral act, or a good work.

Suppose a man converted from Paganism to Christianity, and dying soon after. If any one can be said to be saved by faith, and not by works, it must be such a person. And yet in the faith of this man there are necessarily contained good dispositions, good resolutions, and a good behaviour, which is more than barely believing.

6. Lastly, Since without faith it is impossible to please God, and to be happy either here or hereafter, let us join in that honest and earnest prayer, which the Apostles once addressed to
Jesus

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Jesus Christ; Lord, increase our faith. Let us beg of God that he would deliver us from cruel doubt and distrust, from evil inclinations and evil actions, and confirm in us a belief and a reliance in him, the fountain of all good; and in his son, our only Mediator and Saviour; and in his holy and sanctifying Spirit. This faith and this reliance is the only sure refuge and comfort in every station and situation, in the day of prosperity, and in the day of adversity, in the passage through this life, and in the hour of departure from it,

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S E R M O N . VII.

II TIM. i. 10.

*—Who hath brought life and immortality to light
through the Gospel.*

OF light and darkness there are various degrees, as every one knows; and as one night differeth from another night in darkness, so doth one day differ from another day in brightness. The light may shine upon a place that was quite dark before, and it may shine upon a place that was only gloomy and dusky, and make it conspicuous beyond what it was. The light also which dispels a total darkness may be stronger or fainter.

Light and darkness, in a figurative sense, is knowledge and ignorance; and nothing is more usual than this kind of expression. And of knowledge and ignorance there are as various degrees as of light and darkness.

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The reason for which I have premised these remarks, is this, that although our Lord is said to have brought life and immortality to light, it must not be inferred from such expressions, that nothing or very little was known, believed, and expected concerning a future state, before he discovered it. This interpretation, though adopted by some, is not to be reconciled with fact, and with the state of the world before the coming of Christ, both amongst the Gentiles, and amongst the Jews. They had a knowledge of it, though an imperfect knowledge, compared with that which he superadded. The proofs of this shall be offered under these two heads.

I. Our Lord hath given us a clearer knowledge than without him we could ever have acquired of our state after death.

II. By his resurrection he hath fully assured us that he can and will raise up his servants to eternal life.

I. Our Lord hath given us a clearer knowledge than without him we could ever have acquired of our state after death.

It is true that reason furnishes us with very probable arguments for the soul's future existence, and that many in all ages have believed

it, have hoped for it, at least. Nevertheless it is true also that our Lord hath given us a clearer knowledge of our future condition.

For first, the best arguments which human reason suggests for the immortality of the soul, are founded upon right notions of God and of morality. But before the Gospel was revealed, the common people among the Gentiles had low and imperfect notions of these important truths, and consequently they were not persuaded upon good grounds of their future existence.

The proofs of the soul's immortality, which are taken from its own nature, from its simplicity, spirituality, and inward activity, are by no means to be despised, they have much probability, and they never were or will be confuted. But they are calculated only for those who are used to deep reflection and abstract reasoning, and they produce not that full assent and acquiescence of mind which one could wish.

The moral arguments, as they are called, in behalf of the soul's immortality, as they are more familiar and intelligible, so are they more satisfactory. Here they are in few words.

There is one God and Father of all, endued with all perfections, with supreme wisdom, goodness, justice and power. Man is a free, rational,

rational, moral agent, made by this great Creator, and accountable to him for his actions.

Now it cannot be supposed that God, who is perfectly wise, would endue the soul of man with a capacity of well-doing, and of perpetual improvement, unless he intended it for other purposes than to live here for a very short space, and then perish for ever. He did not create the sun to shine for one day, and the moon to shine for one night, and then to be turned out of being. The human soul is more excellent in its own nature than the sun and moon, or any material and visible object in the universe, and could never be made for no other purpose than to begin and to cease almost in an instant, like a flash of lightning in a dark night. As God is perfectly good, it cannot be supposed that he would make any man desirous of living for ever, and yet incapable of obtaining his desire. As God is most just, it cannot be supposed that it is all one to him whether his creatures serve him or serve him not, that he will suffer the wicked to sin with impunity, and make no distinction between them and the righteous; for as things go in this world, no such proper distinction is made.

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These sort of arguments, obvious and persuasive as they are, yet were usually overlooked in the Pagan world; polytheism, vice, and ignorance had made men insensible of their force; these arguments shone forth along with Christianity, and were in a great measure owing to the Gospel.

Secondly; Though the belief of a state after this was much received amongst men, yet was it entertained by the vulgar rather as an ancient and long-established opinion, than as a truth founded upon just reasoning. Their ancestors had believed a life to come, and they retained the sentiments that had been delivered down to them by tradition; but they could not trace up this tradition to its rise, nor fix it upon an authority which might be trusted. Their opinions of the next state were confused and unsettled, both as to rewards and as to punishments. We may therefore suppose that these fluctuating notions had no great effect upon them, to restrain them from vice, and to incite them to well-doing.

Thirdly; They who argued justly enough to conclude from the nature of God and of man, that it was reasonable to believe the immortality of the soul, and to hope that a future state

of happiness should be the reward of a well-spent life, yet could not hence fairly draw any conclusions to their own full satisfaction. For they must have been sensible that they had not lived up to the laws of nature, and to the dictates of their own reason, and that they had offended the Author of their being in many instances. It is true, they might have recourse to repentance and amendment of life, and think it the most proper method which they could take to recommend themselves to God. But how far this would avail, they could not certainly know, and could only conclude, that it would be better for them if they repented than if they repented not. They could not promise themselves an endless felicity. The best of them, who had committed the fewest faults, could scarcely hope for much more than to be removed after death into some other world, some other state perhaps not much better than this.

Fourthly; Many who believed the immortality of souls, believed also a continual and successive removal of souls from one body to another, and no fixed state of permanent happiness. After death they were to dwell in some other body, and still to continue thus changing their abodes,

abodes, as they supposed that they had already done in ages past. And as in this life they had no memory of their former condition, so the memory of their present state was to be lost in the next. Thus their remembrance at least, which seems to be no small part of one's self, was to perish by death. Our Lord hath opened to us a better prospect than this, promising us an incorruptible body, a life that shall not be taken from us, an unchangeable state, and an house eternal in the heavens.

Fifthly ; Some who in words acknowledged the immortality of the soul, seem in reality to have taken it away, by imagining that the human soul was a part of the great Soul of the world, of the Deity, and that upon its separation from the body, it was reunited to it.

Some endeavoured to prove the soul's immortality by arguments which proved too much, which shewed, if they shewed any thing, that the soul was from all eternity ; whence it followed, that the soul, upon every change of condition, forgot all that was past, and so lost what may be called the most valuable part of itself.

Some supposed, indeed, that the soul should outlive the body, and receive a reward of well-doing ;

doing ; but they thought that the soul was material, and subject to dissolution, and that a time must come when it should perish.

Lastly ; Many had so far debased their understanding as to persuade themselves that death was a dissolution of the whole man, and that there was nothing to hope or to fear beyond this life.

These were the notions of several Pagans concerning the future condition of the soul, which seemed not improper to be here mentioned, because we may hence learn to value what the Gospel hath taught us about these things, and thankfully to receive the light which it hath let in upon our minds.

The Jews had not only, in common with the Gentiles, the light of reason to guide them to the discovery of a future state, but probably a tradition delivered from our first parents of a restoration to a lost Paradise ; they had several examples and several passages in their sacred writings, whence it seems easy to have been collected that God reserved better things for those who served him, than they received in this troublesome world ; and that the good, when they go hence, live to him. But notwithstanding the knowledge which the Jews had

had of these things, our Lord may justly be said to be our instructor in them, since he was a Light to lighten the Gentiles as well as the Jews, and since the Gospel hath given us a more clear, more circumstantial, and more satisfactory account of it, than God had before revealed to his people.

1. The Gospel assures us that we shall rise again.

I am the first, and the last, says our Lord; I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of death. I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day. The hour is coming in which all they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth. The Sea shall give up the dead that are in it; and Death and the Grave shall deliver up the dead that are in them.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, gives an account of the resurrection full of encouragement and consolation, assuring us, that the dead shall rise, and that we who are now clothed and encumbered with bodies, weak, frail, corruptible, subject to diseases and pain, shall in that day be raised with bodies bright,

glorious, incorruptible, and immortal. And in his Epistle to the Romans, he says; He that raised up Jesus from the dead, shall also quicken, shall make alive, shall raise up your mortal bodies. And again: We who have the first-fruits of the spirit, groan within ourselves, expecting the redemption of our body; that is, as he says in other places, that our body may be delivered from the bondage of corruption, that mortality may be swallowed up in life, that this mortal may put on immortality, that Christ may change our vile body into the likeness of his glorious body.

This account of the resurrection is sufficient fully to satisfy us, and to teach us what it concerns us to know, which is, that we, who now live in a frail and mortal body, shall rise and live in a spiritualized body, liable to none of the inconveniences of this earthly tabernacle. Whether the dying body and the glorified body be or be not made up of the same particles of matter, is a question of no moral use, or importance, so long as the mind is the same, and the person the same, which is all that properly concerns us.

2. We are assured that the happiness of the good shall be complete, unchangeable, and endless. This the Scripture declares in a copious variety

variety of terms. The writers of the New Testament seem to labour for expressions, and to want words strong enough to represent it; and there being nothing within the compass of our knowledge that can answer to it, they are forced to have recourse to different images and similitudes, to set forth to us as much as they can of it. They call our reward an exceeding and eternal weight of glory, an unfading crown, an incorruptible inheritance. They tell us, that the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and shall for ever converse with the holy Angels, live with Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and see God, and rejoice in his presence; and that fear, and ignorance, and doubt, and trouble, and sorrow, and tears, are eternally excluded from those quiet regions.

3. We have also reason, from some places of Scripture, to suppose that the souls of the good are not deprived of thought, but are in a place of peace and contentment during their separation from the body.

In the Revelation, the souls of the Martyrs under the altar are said to call upon God to judge the earth; and a present recompense is given to them for their sufferings. These things

indeed are spoken in a figurative manner, yet they seem to imply thus much, that the spirits of the Faithful after death are in a state of sensibility. St. Stephen, when dying, commends his spirit to Christ, praying him to receive it. Christ promiseth his fellow-sufferer on the cross, that he should on that day be with him in paradise, a place of happiness, no doubt, and understood to be so by all the Jews. St. Paul desires to depart hence and to be with Christ, which is far better; judging that to die would be gain to him, and an advantageous exchange. The same Apostle says to the Corinthians, We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord; where he seems to speak of the state after death, and before the resurrection. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks also of the spirits of just men made perfect; where by the spirits of just men are to be understood their souls separated from their bodies; and these, he says, are made perfect; by which he can hardly be supposed to mean less than this, that they are in an happier condition than they were in here on earth. Lastly, we have also the testimony of the holy Spirit, who declares, Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord; they rest

rest from their labours, and their works follow them.

Blessed then are the dead that die in the Lord. But how are they blessed, if they lie in a silent state of senseless inactivity? if they are dead to themselves, and as it were blotted out of the creation? How can we reconcile such an annihilation with blessedness? To be free from trouble and pain is then only happiness, when we are sensible that we are free from them. The death of the good is indeed called rest and sleep, but that implies not a state of inactivity. It is called rest, because it is to them a rest from the cares and pains and toils of life: it is called sleep, because they cease for a while to converse with men and with this visible world, and because they shall wake again to both in the last day. But their souls are alive and awake, and our Lord has told us, that they live to God; they are in his custody, and secure from all evil, expecting the completion of their happiness at the resurrection of the just.

This seems to be a fair and probable inference from the passages of the Scriptures above mentioned; though little be revealed to us concerning the intermediate state of the good, and scarcely any thing concerning the intermediate state

state of the bad. These are points, of which it may be said, to use the words of St. Paul, Now we see darkly, now we know in part.

II. The second thing which we proposed to prove is, that Christ, by his resurrection, hath fully assured us, that he can and will raise up his servants to eternal life.

The time which passed between the death and the resurrection of our Lord was a gloomy interval, a time of triumph to his enemies, of trouble, doubt, fear and perplexity to his disciples.

Whilst he lay in the grave, his enemies concluded that he who had saved others could not save himself; that God in whom he trusted had forsaken him, and would not deliver him; that his pretensions of being his well-beloved Son were groundless; and that they had delivered themselves from a most troublesome adversary, whose good example had been a reproach to them, who had been always censuring their vices, and confuting their cavils, and exposing their hypocrisy.

He had told his disciples that he would give his life a ransom for many. But there was no proof that God had accepted this ransom. He had told them, Because I live, ye shall live also. But he who was to confer eternal life, lay dead

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dead himself, and with him were buried these fair promises.

But on the third day he proved himself to be the expected Messias, of whom it was prophesied that he should be afflicted and glorious, humbled and exalted; that he should give his life an offering for sin, and yet prolong his days and prosper. The resurrection of Christ, declaring him to be the Son of God with power, gives us just grounds to believe and receive as undoubted truths all the doctrines which he teaches, and all the assurances which he hath given us, particularly that he hath reconciled us to God, and that he lives to assist us, and to intercede for us.

If it be certain that Christ arose from the dead, the consequence is plain and unavoidable, that the religion taught by him is true. Thus much the adversaries of Christianity are not backward to grant; and choose rather to deny the fact than the inference. If Christ be not risen, says St. Paul, our faith and our hopes are vain: if he be risen, it is to us a pledge and an earnest of a resurrection. If you ask the Apostle what proof he had to give of the fact? he says, Christ was seen of more than five hundred brethren, and of me also. If you ask

him why their testimony should be admitted? he says, because by me and by other disciples of Christ the signs of an Apostle are wrought in wonders and mighty deeds. Thus the main evidences of Christianity lay in a small compass, and were as clear as the light of the sun; and therefore the Apostles, as well they might, speak severely of those who rejected the Gospel, and represent them as men who withstood the truth, not because it was embarrassed with difficulties, and wanted arguments and proofs, but because they had no heart and no will to do what was right, and to suffer temporal inconvenience, or forego sensual pleasure for the sake of it. Now though we in these ages have not the same kind of evidence, yet what was once plainly true, must always remain true.

I have only a few inferences to lay before you,

1. Our Lord hath taught us, that our souls are immortal. As we are Christians, we have learned this from our earliest infancy, and we usually assent to it without hesitation: and yet, by a strange inconsistency, this important truth lies useless in our minds, and is seldom duly considered. Too many speak and act as if man consisted of nothing besides that earth from

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from which what is visible of him was taken. Thus the soul, like a trifling and imprudent guest, neglecting its own concerns, is very busy in caring for the body, for the decaying house in which it dwells for a few days. And yet the Father of every good gift hath liberally adorned the soul with a variety of accomplishments. It is an object worthy of its own serious contemplation, and in this world it can find nothing equal to itself. A being endued with so many excellent powers; a being capable of perpetual improvement; a being of unwearied activity, a fountain of thoughts that never ceases to flow; a being made to imitate its Author, and, if it perseveres in the love and practice of virtue, to enjoy his favour, and continue for ever safe under his protection. Such reflections upon the value of our souls should raise in us a rational esteem of ourselves, should fill us with an honest and laudable sort of pride, should make us ashamed to be wicked, should teach us to think every thing that is vicious to be mean and altogether beneath us, and to account nothing to be great, the contempt of which is great, should incite us to piety, and give us an indifference for the vanities

vanities of a world which we know that we must outlive.

2. Our Lord hath taught us that death is only the death or sleep of the body; that the souls of the good live to God; and that at the last day, when he shall appear, they shall be clothed with immortal and glorified bodies, and dwell for ever with him. And to confirm these truths, he arose himself in power and splendor, and became the first-fruits of them that sleep.

Thus hath he delivered us from a state of doubts and fears, and hath in a great measure disarmed death of its terrors: The grave is not our last home, where we should sleep for all ages; but we commit our bodies to the earth, as to a fruitful field, faithful to the sower, which will return us back an hundred-fold, by restoring them to us incorruptible and immortal.

3. The resurrection of Christ contains in it the strongest motives to cast off our sins, and to prepare ourselves for the glories which shall be revealed; and to take off our affections from this world, and to set them on things above.

The resurrection of our Lord is a proof that God hath performed all that could be hoped on
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his part to bring us to him. But then it remains on our part that we rise instantly, as the Scripture expresses it, from the death of sin to the new life of holiness, that we work out our own salvation with diligence, and provide without delay for our future well-being. In vain did Christ die and rise again for us, if we lie buried in trespasses and sins, and put off our conversion to the hour of death, when it is forced and deceitful; to old age, when it is unable to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; to the morrow, which we may never see.

Christ, the author of our better hopes, is risen from the dead, and lives to intercede for us, and is gone before us to prepare us a place in his kingdom. But if we would be the better for having such an advocate, and would secure to ourselves an inheritance above, our affections must be there, and we must live, not as children of this world, but as the candidates of heaven. If the things below possess our hearts, and have all our thoughts and wishes, if our time be all consumed in cultivating perishing friendships with earthly objects, we have no friend in heaven, and no mansions there prepared for us. If we do not think
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eternal life worth the seeking, it will not be obtruded upon us, and it is too valuable to be bought at so low a price as a few wishes for it at the close of our life, accompanied with a shame and a sorrow that we never thought of it before.

Let us turn from these motives of fear to motives of hope and love and gratitude, at this season, when the voice of joy and health is in the dwellings of the righteous, and we commemorate the mighty things which the right hand of the Lord hath brought to pass. Let us encourage ourselves to well-doing by reflecting upon the victories of our Redeemer over the powers of darkness, and upon the promises which he is so able and so willing to perform.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N V I I I .

ACTS i. 8.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.

IF we consider the Apostles of Christ, to whom these words were spoken, in their public and in their private character, we find that they had a double office to perform, as they were Apostles, and as they were Christians. As Apostles, they were appointed to convert, and to instruct and guide those whom they had converted : as Christians, they were obliged to live suitably to the religion which they professed and taught. That they might perform these several duties, they had a promise of assistance from the Holy Ghost, who is said in the New Testament to be the dispenser of all the gifts and helps necessary both for the promulgation of the Gospel, and for the sanctification of Believers ; concerning which differ-

ent gifts I shall now discourse; and first I shall consider the miraculous gifts which the holy Spirit conferred upon the Disciples.

I. Our Lord intending to establish his religion in the world, made choice of means and instruments in appearance most disproportionate and unequal to the accomplishment of that end. He sent men to teach his will, who before he gave them his Spirit were not qualified to execute the great things for which they were designed; that in the establishment of the Gospel the immediate assistance of God, and the power of the Holy Ghost, might the more manifestly appear.

Christ at his ascension commanded his Apostles to go and teach all people. This they seemed not capable of performing upon many accounts, particularly because they understood not the language of foreign nations, and had neither leisure, nor opportunity, nor perhaps a genius to learn them.

The Holy Ghost therefore conferred upon them the knowledge of the languages. A great concourse of people from different and remote places was present at this miracle, and each heard the Apostles speaking in their tongues. Thus began the promise of divine assistance to be

be fulfilled, and a way was opened for the publication of Christianity, which immediately had its effect, and converted three thousand persons.

The gift of tongues was a miracle in which there could be no deceit and illusion. The Apostles were well known : they had always dwelt in Judæa ; their manner of life, the circumstances of their education, the meanness of their condition were notorious. Several things concurred to shew that they could not have acquired this knowledge in an ordinary way. If they had learned languages by the help of men, that would surely have been discovered ; if we should say, by their own sagacity and industry, that is too improbable to be supposed ; and whether without or with the assistance of others, the labour of some years would scarcely have been sufficient.

This was also a miracle new and singular in its kind, and therefore adapted to affect the Jews in a particular manner. They would probably be most moved by wonderful works of which the fewest instances had been known.

This was a power which neither Moses, nor the Prophets, nor John the Baptist had received, nor had Christ himself during his ministry ever exercised it. The blind man who had been

so from his birth, to whom Christ gave sight, immediately observed that since the world began, it had not been heard that any man opened the eyes of such an one. He concluded that his kind benefactor had not only wrought a miracle, but a great miracle, because it was singular.

And moreover, it was not only the speaking new languages, but teaching sacred truths in a new and effectual manner. We hear them speak, say the multitude, the wonderful works of God. This doubled the miracle, and was all that a reasonable person could desire for his satisfaction and conviction.

The gift of tongues was of particular service to Christianity. It increased the number of believers at Jerusalem, and engaged the admiration and favour of the people so much, that the enemies of Christ could not accomplish their designs against the Disciples, and it served to convey the Gospel to distant regions.

For at the time of Pentecost there was a great resort of Jews and Proselytes from various and remote countries. The gift of tongues conferred upon the Disciples served to convince and convert many of these persons, and they were serviceable in carrying Christianity with them

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to their several abodes. Afterwards the Æthiopian Eunuch, Cornelius the Roman Centurion, Sergius Paulus the Proconsul, Dionysius the Areopagite, and others were converted. By these persons, and by the travels of the Apostles and of their disciples, Christianity was established in the Roman Empire, and in the East; and then the Greek tongue, which was so generally spread, together with human industry in learning other languages, might be sufficient to carry the Gospel as far and as soon as Providence intended; and accordingly the gift of tongues seems to have been of no long continuance in the Church.

The Apostles were to be witnesses of the things which they had heard and seen. It was therefore necessary that they should produce sufficient proof of their veracity, and of their divine mission; for it was not to be expected that men should give credit to obscure and unknown persons, and believe what they attested, only because they confidently asserted it. But the Holy Ghost bare witness to them, by enabling them to perform various miracles publicly and frequently.

The Apostles were sent to instruct the world in divine truths, and to preach a doctrine amia-

ble to unprejudiced hearers, but opposite in many things to the opinions in which the Jews and Gentiles had been educated. That they might perform this, they had a promise from Christ that they should be endued with a wisdom and with a strength of reason which none of their adversaries should be able to withstand. And indeed without divine assistance they were not qualified for so high an office. They had profited little from the instructions of their Master, they had been slow to understand, and ready to misunderstand what he taught. But the divine Spirit wrought a sudden change in their minds, enabled them to recollect all that Christ at various times had said to them, and taught them to persuade, to convince, and to triumph over all opposition.

The Apostles were to teach all necessary truths. This they were not able to perform; for some of those truths they knew not, or they were not disposed to believe. Christ says to them; I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. The truths which they were at that time unfit to receive, seem to have been these:

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That the kingdom of Christ was spiritual, that he came not to conquer the nations, to make the Jews a flourishing people, and to reign here below, but would ascend into heaven, and thence send his Spirit to govern and instruct his Church :

That the Messias came as much for the sake of the Gentiles as of the Jews, and that all men should be invited to partake of the blessing and benefit of the Gospel :

That the Jewish dispensation should not last long ; that the Law, though divine, was only temporary, and must give place to a better covenant.

The employment to which the Apostles were called was honourable, but difficult and dangerous. Our Lord promised them success in planting the Gospel, but he concealed not from them the labours and the sufferings to which they should be exposed. Whilst their Master continued with them, they entertained flattering hopes of temporal happiness ; but he took care to undeceive them, he assured them that their labours would not be rewarded here below, that they must take up their cross and follow him, and tread in his steps, and pass through tribulation ; and he commanded them

not only to bear those evils with patience and resolution, but to meet them with cheerfulness and joy.

This he required of persons who shewed a want of courage and constancy upon every occasion, who deserted him, and fled shamefully from him, and were under great fear and consternation at the first appearance of danger.

But the holy Spirit supplied these defects, and gave them a resolution and courage which astonished their persecutors, a constancy and patience which no repeated sufferings could shake; he taught them to glory in reproaches and afflictions, and to rejoice that they were found worthy to lay down their lives for the sake of Christ.

The Church at first wanted spiritual guides and governors who should instruct and confirm Christians in the faith, who should convert unbelievers, who should have proper qualifications to preside over a society destitute of all secular authority, deprived of the advantages which attend and secure human governments, discountenanced and oppressed by the civil Powers. For these ends the Holy Ghost imparted to the Apostles many excellent gifts. He conferred on them the knowledge of all necessary truths, and of some
future

future events; he enabled them to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cast out devils, to work various miracles. It is commonly thought that they had also a power which our Lord himself never exercised, a power of inflicting diseases as corrections upon disobedient and dissolute Christians, to bring them to a better mind. They were also sometimes enlightened so as to discern the hearts of men, and to know who were secret enemies to religion, though they outwardly professed it. These extraordinary powers were variously imparted to the disciples; nor were they confined to them, but were communicated by the hands of the Apostles in different degrees to other Christians of that time.

II. I proceed, secondly, to speak of those gifts which the Holy Ghost imparts to all sincere believers, to all good persons in all ages.

If any one should say that there can be no such thing as a divine assistance acting upon the human mind, because men are not sensible of it, or because such influences would destroy human liberty, he would affirm more than he would be able to prove. God who made us, who is a Spirit, who is ever present to us, in whom we live and move, may doubtless act upon our minds by many ways unknown and undiscoverable.

able. He may by his holy Spirit awaken us to a sense of our duty, may cherish our good dispositions, may comfort us in affliction, may strengthen us in difficulties, may animate us in dangers, without any act of compulsion. We cannot prove the impossibility of this, and therefore we ought not to conclude that there can be no such thing.

It is frequently declared in the New Testament that God dwells in the good, that Christ dwells in them; that the Holy Ghost dwells in them; every Christian is said there to have the Spirit; to receive the Holy Ghost, and to be a disciple of Christ is represented there as one and the same thing; and in a word, frequent mention is made of the assistance of the Spirit.

God hath given us in the Gospel a rule for our actions; he hath promised us, upon our repentance and perseverance, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. These benefits Christ has acquired for us by his sufferings, and the truth of these things is confirmed by the Holy Ghost, the author of the miracles and prophecies upon which our religion is founded.

By the assistance of the Spirit must be meant either no more than these motives and encourage-

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ragements to piety ; or something more must be understood, which must be an influence upon our minds.

That something more is meant by the aids of the Spirit than the bare external motives to obedience, may be shewed, without an examination of particular texts of Scripture, by this argument:

Christians ought to request of God only those things which God hath promised to grant. If God has promised to his servants nothing besides remission of sins and eternal life, a Christian would indeed have cause to return daily thanks to God for the revelation made to him in the Gospel ; but he would have no grounds to ask any thing of God relating to his spiritual concerns, except this, that God would accept his repentance and his religious endeavours, and make him happy in the next world.

On the contrary, it is plain from the doctrine of the New Testament that a Christian hath leave and encouragement to ask that God would give him his holy Spirit, that he would give him religious wisdom, that he would assist him to overcome temptations, and to persevere in his obedience.

Why

Why in particular should a Christian ask of God, as he is directed to ask, that he would give him his holy Spirit, if by that Spirit is meant nothing besides the Gospel? That is given him already, and once for all; so that he might with the same reason ask God to give him a body and a soul.

But that we may not fall into enthusiastic notions concerning this divine assistance, these things are to be observed; first, that the influence of the Spirit is only given at such times and on such occasions as require it; secondly, that it is not distinguishable from the operations of our own minds; thirdly, that it leaves us free agents, that it compels not, that it only inclines and aids, and that it may be resisted; lastly, that a life of obedience and righteousness is a proof, and the only proof, that the Spirit dwells in us. The fruit of the Spirit, say the Scriptures, is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance. The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. In this method of judging there is no difficulty, and there can be no deceit. These are clear proofs by which we may satisfy not only ourselves, but others also, that we enjoy the assistance

assistance which God hath promised to his children; whilst a light within; a call from heaven, a secret voice, an extraordinary impulse of the Spirit, and a conversation with him, are often the effects, not of divine favour, but of a weak understanding and a warm head; and sometimes something worse, even mere hypocrisy and unblushing assurance. Imagination, when it gets the better of Reason, is a dangerous guide; it is a good servant, but a bad master.

Good actions, as they are performed with a design of pleasing God, and according to the rules of the Gospel, are religious actions; as they are the result of choice and reason, they are moral virtues; and as the influences of the Holy Ghost contribute to produce them, they are, in the language of the Scripture, fruits of the Spirit; they are, to speak in the same figure, fruits of that seed which God hath sowed and watered, but which would have withered and died, if it had not fallen into good ground, and been received by well-disposed minds.

The divine assistance, or the influence of the Spirit, or Grace, as it is commonly called, is to be distinguished and divided, as I observed before,

before, into the extraordinary and the ordinary.

The true * difference between them seems to be this, that the extraordinary and miraculous operation of the Spirit is distinguishable by the person on whom it is conferred, from the operation of his own mind; and that the ordinary influence of the Spirit is not thus distinguishable.

The former is communicated by a strong impulse, by visions, by an outward or an inward voice, revealing secret things past, present, or future, and conferring prophetic and miraculous powers.

The latter is an impulse of the moral kind, tending to the improvement of the servants of God. It is an act of the divine Spirit upon the human faculties, the chief and noblest of which is reason; and upon the human reason it must principally act, to strengthen and enlarge it.

* Dr. Middleton, in his *Vindication of the Free Inquiry*, (p. 327.) derides the distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary assistance of the Spirit, as Theological Jargon, and words without sense; and adds, that they who use them ought to define the precise meaning of them. In this latter point I agree with him, and follow his advice.

It

It is possible indeed that the Spirit of God may also act upon the inferior faculties of man, that is, upon the imagination, and upon the passions, exciting hope, fear, sorrow, joy, desire, aversion. But then it must be in such a manner as to leave the passions obedient and subservient to the superior principle of reason; else God would counteract his own purpose, which is to preserve us moral and rational agents to support that faith which was first founded on proper evidence, and a serious conviction of the truth of Religion. The overbearing impulses, emotions and agitations, by which men are incited to foolish or unlawful actions, must needs proceed from other causes: they are the mere effects of a disordered body and mind; they are the effects of Enthusiasm, which I take to be a false persuasion of the Enthusiast that the Spirit acts upon him in a sensible manner, which he can certainly distinguish from the acts of his own spirit.

That the Spirit of God acts in a secret manner upon the minds of those who are fit to receive it, is a doctrine plainly taught in the Scriptures.

* See Ezekiel xxxvi. 26.

But

But it may be said, Why should men imagine that they have this divine assistance, if they cannot discern it by any thing that passeth in their own minds? We answer that it is one of those doctrines which by the light of nature we could not have known. We might have thought it probable, but could not have proved the certainty of it to ourselves or to others. So it rests upon the authority of revealed Religion. And yet, I know not how it came to pass, but it seems to have been an opinion amongst the Pagans, that the Gods put men upon certain actions, suggested to them certain thoughts, and inclined their minds in a secret manner. We find this frequently in the *oldest Pagan writer that is extant. Afterwards when Philosophy was cultivated, some of their wise men were of opinion that there was such a thing as a divine *assatus*, or interposition, acting upon exalted and purified minds, and assisting them in well-doing.

I have only a few remarks to add relating to this subject.

1. The Apostles, in the exercise of miraculous powers, were not left to themselves, to use them at their own discretion, according to the dic-

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tates of mere human reason, or inclination and affection. They did not work miracles in every place through which they passed, or before every assembly to which they preached the Gospel. We may therefore suppose that they gave these proofs of their divine mission at such times only, and upon such occasions as seemed proper to the holy Spirit by whom they were guided.

2. The Holy Ghost imparted these gifts severally, and in various degrees, to the first Christians, according to his own good pleasure. They were designed not so much for the benefit of those who received them, as for the benefit and conversion of others, and to be a testimony of the truth of the Gospel; and they were not constantly bestowed according to the moral qualifications of Christians. A person in those times by working miracles gave indeed a sufficient proof that the Holy Ghost assisted him, but no sure proof that the Holy Ghost dwelt in him. One person might do wonderful works in confirmation of the Gospel, and not live according to its rules: another might perform no miracles, and yet be a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost; and therefore St. Paul prefers charity and the works of righteousness to all miraculous powers.

3. The gifts which the Apostles received were of two sorts: the first was of the miraculous kind; the second was courage and constancy, and a mind not to be deterred by dangers, or seduced by any worldly advantages from preaching the Gospel, and from observing its precepts.

These gifts differed in this respect, that the first were operations upon them as upon subjects merely passive: they contributed nothing on their part towards them, except sometimes Faith, or a trust and belief that they had such powers and such assistance. But it was not so in the second sort. Their piety, their courage, and their perseverance, were acts of their own choice, in the performance of which they were, indeed, supported and assisted in an uncommon manner, as they were called to great dangers and to extraordinary trials; but still they were acts of choice, from which they had a natural power to refrain, and therefore they were virtues which God promised to reward with an exceeding and eternal weight of Glory.

4. Lastly; Since the ordinary assistances of the Holy Ghost are promised to the faithful in all ages, we find in this doctrine proper motives to humility and to gratitude; to a sense

of our own imperfections which deprive us of all possibility of pleading any merits of our own; and to a sense of the divine goodness, which will add strength to our weakness, and support us in our Christian warfare. It is our duty, therefore, to pray to God that he would give us his Spirit; it is our duty to purify our hearts from evil affections and vicious habits, that we may be qualified to receive him; it is our duty to be thankful to this divine Guest, who condescends to be our guide, and our comforter; to be careful not to grieve and offend him by wicked actions, lest he should withdraw himself from us; to remember that he who is a pure and holy Spirit cannot dwell in polluted hearts, in temples that are not his own.

S E R M O N IX.

LUKE xiv. 23.

And the Lord said unto the servant ; Go into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

IN this parable our Lord describes certain events relating to the Gospel, some things which then began to be accomplished, and some which were to be fulfilled after his resurrection ; so that this, like many other of his parables, was also a prophecy.

He compares the kingdom of heaven to a king making a marriage-feast for his son, and sending to call those who were bidden. By these are meant the Jews in general, to whom Christ came, and the Gospel was first preached. They who were bidden refused to come, and returned rude answers, or frivolous excuses. Upon this, the Lord being angry, said to his

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servant ;

servant ; Go out into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. By these are meant publicans, harlots, and the lower and meaner sort of the Jewish people ; not that all the Jewish converts were such, but because the most considerable persons of that nation were usually the most averse from the Christian religion.

But there being yet room for more guests, the Lord said unto the servant ; Go out into the highways and hedges, that is, go to the Gentiles, and compel them to come in ; that is, invite them, intreat them, persuade them, press them, be importunate with them.

Upon a day which is set apart to commemorate a double deliverance from Popery and Tyranny, a discourse concerning the unlawfulness and great evil of persecution cannot be unsuitable. It is not a matter of mere curiosity and speculation ; it is a practical point, a point of Christian morality. It may give us a due sense of the rational liberty which we enjoy, a resolution to preserve it, and right notions of the principles and practices of a Church, which requires a blind assent to numberless absurdities, and spares neither the body nor the soul of those

those who will not submit to her despotic government.

There have been Christians, who through much weakness of judgment, or wickedness of heart, have found the doctrine of persecution in the words of the text: Compel them to come in. Compel them, that is, according to their exposition, Compel persons who are in an error, to renounce it, and to join themselves to the true Church; compel them to it by severity and violence. This hath been and is the doctrine and the constant practice of the church of Rome, the unreasonableness of which I propose to shew; observing first, that the arguments against it are so numerous, that the difficulty is, not to find out any, but to make a proper choice out of them, and that many Protestant writers have so effectually confuted the frivolous pretences of the Compellers, that they have in a manner exhausted the subject, and have left little for the diligence or sagacity of those who come after them.

Compel them to come in.

There are three ways of compelling men to come in, that is, of bringing persons over to our communion, and to our opinion, in matters of religion.

The first is, by ill usage and persecution, the unlawfulness of which I propose to shew.

The second is, by persuation, instruction, and conviction.

This is allowed on all hands to be a fair and honest procedure; this is a laudable and rational kind of compulsion and violence: this is the compulsion which is indirectly recommended in the text. Thus the Apostles preached the Gospel, and thus they converted multitudes.

The third way is of an ambiguous kind, which it seems difficult to appraise; for it is neither so good, as to deserve to be cried up for a virtue, nor yet so bad, as to be condemned for a vice. It is overcoming men by kindness and courtesies, alluring and proselyting them by favours, honours, profits, gifts, and rewards.

Strictly speaking, this is not the way to enlighten the mind, and to assist its inquiries after truth; but rather to seize a man on his weak side, and to give him a bias and a prejudice. And yet it cannot be altogether and absolutely condemned. Something of this kind is unavoidable. Religious people will always be disposed to favour those who will come over to their principles; and if Christian nations had never used

used worse methods than these for converting unbelievers, heretics, and schismatics, they would have had both more success in the undertaking, and less blame from all honest and equitable judges.

Now let us consider the vile nature and the pernicious effects of persecution.

1. First; It is not a probable way to make men good.

If we would serve God in an acceptable manner, it is requisite that we know the will of God, and that we pay him a cheerful obedience. When the first of these is wanting, there can be no religion; and when any act of religion is performed with reluctance and aversion, it is the service of a beast, rather than of a man; it is only a bodily action in which the mind hath no share. This is acknowledged, I think, by all sects of Christians, and it evidently shews, that compulsion can have no good influence. For what is the pretended design and end of persecution? It is to instruct and to reform, to reclaim from error, and to give knowledge. But bonds and imprisonment, fines and stripes, racks and gibbets, will not inspire the art of reasoning justly; they will not cause a doctrine or system to seem more probable or more amiable to the suffer-

suffering person than it appeared before he was punished. Ill usage may break his heart, but it will not open his heart, that he may understand the Scriptures.

2. Persecution will probably make men more wicked than they were, whilst they lived in error unmolested.

To prove this, I shall only take for granted, that men usually love the conveniences and fear the evils of life so much, that they will conform outwardly to a religion which in their hearts they detest, rather than endure infamy and contempt, hunger and rags, cold and nakedness; the consequence of which is, that such persons when they are made external profelytes, have not freed themselves from any one false opinion to which they were slaves before, and have contracted the additional guilt of acting contrary to the dictates of their conscience. Conscience is a guide which every man is obliged to follow. Conscience is out of the reach of violence; oppression will not subdue it; the noise of whips and chains will not silence it. A man must be convinced before he can be converted; and till such conviction be wrought in his mind, it is better for him that he should act suitably to his own false notions, than that he should pay an unwilling

unwilling and insincere obedience even to the precepts of God.

It follows not hence that evil becomes good or innocent, because our conscience commands us to do it; for as we are obliged to act according to our judgment, so we are obliged to judge rightly, when we enjoy the means of getting information. When we use not those means, we offend God by our wilful carelessness and presumptuous ignorance, and are answerable to him for the errors and faults which we might have avoided.

3. Persecution is contrary to the spirit of Christianity. The religion of our Saviour is a religion like its author, full of humanity, lenity, and universal benevolence. Though he preached the Gospel in vain to many persons, whose unbelief proceeded from a corrupted heart, as himself declared, who knew what was in man, yet he neither called down fire from heaven to consume them, nor sent Legions of Angels to dragoon them. To their obstinacy and malice he only opposed acts of kindness, and miracles, and arguments, and exhortations, and reproofs. He sent forth his Apostles into the world, not to persecute, but to be persecuted, and to establish the worship of

of God by such methods as himself had employed. It is not to be imagined that out of the mouth which said, Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another, could proceed an order to exercise all sorts of cruelty upon men for their errors in religion.

4. The consequence of supposing persecution to be recommended by the Gospel, is that all sects of Christians would have the same call to plague and destroy those who differ from them. To say that they alone who are the true church would have this privilege, is a childish evasion. All sects of Christians are the true Church, in their own opinion, and would apply such a commission to themselves, as their right, or their duty. And thus indeed they have acted. The Church of Rome hath signalized herself above all others in persecuting. It were to be wished that the disgrace and guilt of such unchristian doctrine and practice had belonged to that Church alone; but it hath at certain times infected other Christian societies; and to the shame of the human understanding, there have been persons, who though they had suffered persecution themselves, would yet needs persecute others, and were not taught better things

things by woful experience, which usually softens the most inhuman, and instructs the most stupid.

It is easy to imagine what would be the consequence of a general persuasion amongst Christians, that men ought to be destroyed, if they refused to forsake their errors; what mutual hatred, cruelty, uncharitableness, malice and revenge would every where abound. Indeed such a deplorable and scandalous state of things could not last long, because the absolute necessity of mutual forbearance would appear with an irresistible evidence.

5. It is very strange that Christians in these latter ages can find the doctrine of persecution so plainly laid down in the New Testament, when the first Christians could see no such thing there. This argument ought to be of some weight with the Compellers, who commonly pretend to pay a great veneration to Christian Antiquity. To their sorrow and shame, they may observe, that the earlier Christian writers are professed enemies to persecution, make very ingenious and severe remarks upon the inhuman behaviour of the Pagans, and reason most justly upon the liberty which every man ought to enjoy of following the

the dictates of his conscience in matters of religion, whilst in all things lawful he obeys the Civil Magistrate, and is a good and useful subject.

I deny not that the patrons of compulsion have in some sense antiquity on their side; they are able to prove that the doctrine of persecution is not very modern; and may object to us the examples of Christian Emperors of former ages; and they might as well add to them kings of France and Spain of the two last centuries; for it is not the idle parade of great names, either in Church or State, that can change oppression into virtue.

6. Lastly, since persecution is not a probable way to make men good, since it will probably make them worse than they would else have been, since it is so opposite to the spirit of the Gospel, and so terrible in its consequences, that if it were universally practised it must end in the subversion of Christianity, it evidently follows, that if it be commanded or permitted in the Scriptures, the order or permission should be contained in terms strong, plain, express, positive, very easy to be understood, like the precepts which require piety, charity,

charity, and justice. But that is not the case: the patrons of wholesome severity use the Scriptures, as they use those whom they undertake to convert; they give them the torture, and *compel* them, against the genius of language, and all rational exposition, to come into their sentiments. The words of the text are, *Compel them to come in.* Is it clear that these words mean, Use violence and punishments? All who have any sense or sincerity must confess that it is not, when they have seen the reasons which are given against it. It hath been fully proved that in many places of Scripture the expressions of compelling and of being compelled have a view to that compliance, which, to speak in the same metaphor, is extorted by entreaties, by earnest importunity, by arguments, by promises, by other moral motives, and that in all languages men are said to be forced, necessitated, obliged, compelled to do things, in a figurative sense. So, to give a single instance out of many, in this parable one of those who were invited, excuses himself, and says; I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it. The word in the original is the same with that in

in the text; I am compelled to go and see it*.

The scope therefore and turn of the parable lead us thus to explain the word, *compel*. It was an act of kindness, not of rigour, in the Lord to send out his servants to those who could not expect so great a favour. He sends them to bid these strangers to the marriage-feast, as St. Matthew hath it, to compel them, as St. Luke more emphatically expresses it. We do not read that he sent them out armed, to use violence in case of refusal, nor is that the way of bringing people to an entertainment. Had such preposterous methods been used, they who were thus bidden might justly have said, Are ye come out, as against thieves, with swords and staves, to take us?

This is not indeed the only passage in the New Testament, upon which Persecutors insist. They defend themselves by the examples of our Lord driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and throwing St. Paul to the earth, and of St. Peter putting to death, as they call it, Ananias and his wife. These are their proofs of the expedience of persecution, which

* *Βιάζομαι*, a stronger word than *ἀναγκάζομαι*, is thus twice used by Josephus, at the beginning of his Antiquities.

in reality are proofs of nothing, except of the ignorance or disingenuity of those who use them.

But let us not altogether pass over their more plausible arguments.

1. They tell us, that it is good to punish men who are in error, to make them bethink themselves, to put them upon an examination of facts and reasons, which else they would not have considered.

To this it is answered, that on the contrary this is not a proper way to make men examine; for he who examines any point, particularly any point of religion, ought to be free from passion and prejudice. That punishment tends to bias the judgment, is too clear to admit a dispute.

We may also observe, that in every religious sect, erring or not erring in points of faith, these three sorts of men are to be found; first, persons who look upon all religion with much indifference, and are outwardly of that to which chance or custom hath joined them; secondly, persons who are sincere in their profession, but have too great an affection for the things of this life; and thirdly, persons who are resolved to serve God according to the dictates of

their conscience, and to suffer all things rather than act contrary to it. Surely it will be allowed by the most prejudiced, that these last are the best, the worthiest of the three sorts. Now these will be the chief sufferers, and the punishments inflicted upon them will not have the intended effect.

The first sort will probably comply without hesitation, and be joined in external communion with the persecuting Church; for all Churches are alike to them. The second sort, intimidated by punishments, will pretend to be converted, and still retain their errors. The last will perish, rather than basely dissemble, and will be Confessors and Martyrs, in their own opinion at least. Thus the Persecutors will furnish their Church with atheists and hypocrites, and destroy well-meaning although mistaken men. This is the honour, and these the advantages, which are to be gained by such proceedings.

But let us suppose that persecution may at last produce some good effect, that a sect may by that method be destroyed, and the division cease for the future; yet persecution is not the more lawful. We are not to do evil that good may come of it. Public calamities, pestilence,

famine, and war, have sometimes made nations more religious than they were: it is not therefore fit that a prince should invade and ruin a wicked nation, that the inhabitants may learn righteousness.

2. Persecutors frequently object, that by permitting liberty of conscience, encouragement is given to scurrility and profaneness.

In this objection are industriously confounded liberty, and licentiousness; erroneous opinions, and wicked practices; mistakes which affect not civil society, and doctrines which tend to its ruin. No discreet defenders of liberty ever desired that encouragement or impunity should be allowed to impudence and vice.

3. Persecutors object also, that by such indulgence heresies are propagated, to the eternal destruction of those who are deluded; and that therefore the utmost rigour is true Christian charity, and, by the punishment of a few, saves many from everlasting misery.

One of the most odious and pernicious doctrines of the Church of Rome is, that all who separate themselves from her are in a state of damnation. A man may believe a great quantity of nonsense, or may fancy that he believes

it; he may worship a piece of wood, or a piece of bread; he may think that the same body can be present in ten thousand places at once; and yet he may have humanity and pity for his fellow-creatures, and love his neighbour as himself; but this uncharitable notion hath a plain tendency to corrupt the temper, and to make a man more savage than a brute to all who dissent from him. Hence ariseth hatred of those, who are supposed to be hated of God; hence those tribunals of iniquity called Inquisitions; hence plots and assassinations; hence violating all faith, and making a jest of all oaths, and treaties, and solemn promises; hence equivocations and mental reservations; hence the forcing away children from parents, and wives from husbands, and any oppression which tends to the blessed end of extirpating heresy. This end sanctifies all villanies; all is done out of mere compassion for the Souls of men, and piety towards God; a diabolical compassion, and a piety worse than profaneness.

The Papiſts who dwell amongst us, will, if I am not mistaken, usually disown the doctrine of persecution, when it is objected to them: but in all places where the Church of Rome is the

the Church established, it is openly avowed; and if any persons be amongst them, who think otherways, as probably there are such, and especially of the Laity, it is not safe for them to say so, in a land of Inquisition.

The doctrine, that all who are not of the Church of Rome are damned, must needs have horrible effects, when it is entertained by morose and insolent men, since it can spoil even a courteous and affable temper; as it appeared from the barbarous usage which the Protestants in France received from their own countrymen.

It hath been * observed of us, that seriousness and zeal for religion is almost the natural temper of the English, to which may be added a bent towards melancholy and fanaticism. This seriousness is easily turned into oppressive severity, when it is joined to bigotry and superstition; so that, if Popery were the prevailing religion amongst us, we may conclude that there would be no toleration for any thing else.

But liberty of conscience produceth many evils. True it is, that liberty ever is and ever will be abused; and that where men are free to think

* Tillotson.

for themselves, and to declare their opinions, seducers will be busy in making converts, and weak and unstable men will be led away. But this is an evil for which there is no remedy, except the utmost degree of severity; and this is a remedy worse than the evil. It is acknowledged to be so by several persons, who approve lower and less cruel severities. They should consider, that moderate punishments have been found, by long experience, ineffectual towards reformation of errors; and that divisions cannot be entirely cured or prevented for the future, unless by destroying all the weaker party.

They should also consider, that there is nothing good and desirable which is not often the innocent cause and occasion of evil; and that many inconveniences must be borne, because the redressing of them is a greater evil.

There are, for example, in all nations, many gluttons, drunkards, liars, slanderers, adulterers, dissolute and debauched persons, who are at least as bad members of society as those who err in matters of faith. Persecutors seldom desire that such should be destroyed; nor are they to be blamed for not desiring it. But then they should not have two weights and two measures; they should bear as much with mistaken men,

as they bear with men vicious and usually self-condemned.

4. Another argument, of which persecutors make great use, is taken from the laws which God gave to the Jews, by which idolaters and false prophets were to be put to death; and from the practice of those kings of Israel and Judah who put these laws in execution.

Of several answers which might be made to this, I shall only mention one at present, namely, that the laws of the Jews, as such, are no laws to us. To shew that any of the Jewish laws are to be observed by us, one of these two things must be proved; either, first, that it is a law of nature, as, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness; or, secondly, that our Lord hath enjoined the observation of it. Before we can plead a command or a permission from God for persecution, we must find this doctrine either contained in the New Testament, or taught by reason. But when we consult the one or the other, we meet with nothing in favour of it.

God indeed may order that the breach of any of his laws be punished with death. He who gave life, may take it away himself, or appoint another to do it. He may command any nation to punish with death uncircum-

cision, or the profanation of the sabbath, or the worship of false Gods. He may command one nation to destroy another; but none of these things can be done without his appointment. Divine Wisdom alone can authorize them, and not *Public Wisdom*, as some mightily love to call it, which is too often *Public Folly*.

Great reason have we to be thankful that we are not educated in such stupid and inhuman principles, nor under the dominion of a Church, which hath turned religion into absurdity and contradiction, and forces it upon every one over whom she can exercise her tyranny, which, instead of administering wholesome food and spiritual correction, feeds with stones, and chastizes with scorpions.

We enjoy as much liberty of judgment as any people in the world, and much more than many amongst us have deserved; for so it is, that he who takes care to avoid those grosser crimes which are punished by the laws of this, and of all other civilized nations, may openly deride all religion, may expose his opinions and himself to the public, and be as profane and as rude as he can desire. Instead therefore of adding any thing more concerning the evil of persecution, I choose to conclude this discourse with a
few

S E R M O N IX. 183

few observations upon the contrary extremes, and the care with which we ought to shun them.

The spirit of persecution, when it is not owing to political maxims and self-interested views, to cruelty, oppressive pride, and the love of arbitrary power; when there is any thing of conscience and sincerity mixed with it, ariseth from a blind and impetuous zeal, but yet a zeal for religion: the contrary fault to this is a coldness, indifference, and carelessness for truth and virtue.

The spirit of persecution supposes, that all errors arise from stubbornness and depravity of heart, and shall be punished with damnation: the contrary excess esteems faith to be of no importance, and morality the whole duty of man.

The spirit of persecution is a spirit of malice, hatred, and detraction, let loose upon all who differ in opinion; the contrary extreme consists in conversing much and cultivating friendships with persons of debauched principles and practices, for the sake of profit or pleasure.

The

The spirit of persecution is an inveterate enemy to examining matters of faith, and to reformation of the grossest abuses: opposite to this is the spirit of contradiction, and the love of novelty and singularity, with which whosoever is smitten, is ever framing new systems of religion and morality, and not able to conceal any of his awkward inventions.

Happy and wise is he who can keep at a proper distance from both extremes. He esteems the Gospel to be the greatest blessing which God hath conferred upon us; he carefully endeavours to understand and to practise it, and to recommend it to others. Acts of civility and humanity he exerciseth towards all, but avoids the society of those, who in their conversation and behaviour shew a disregard to God, to truth, to probity, and to religion. His faith depends not upon human authority, fashion, and custom; he reasons and judges and determines for himself, but never forgets the respect due to civil society, or hates those who differ from him.

This seems to be the middle way between superstition and licentiousness, the way to live in peace and reputation, to do no harm, and to do good to mankind.

Of

S E R M O N IX. 187

Of all moral qualities, the most valuable is piety ; the next to it is prudence ; and they must be joined together ; for piety without prudence becomes enthusiasm and bigotry, and prudence without piety sinks into knavish craft.

S E R M O N

HERMON IX

Of all mortal passions the most violent is
that of the heart to be in possession of
what is desired together with the desire
of the heart to be in possession of what is
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189
SERMON X.

MATTH. xii. 39.

An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a Sign, and there shall no Sign be given to it, but the Sign of the prophet Jonas.

UPON the perverse and unreasonable request of the Pharisees to Christ, that he would shew them a sign from heaven, our Lord replied, that they should indeed have one remarkable sign given to them, a sign sufficient to convince them of his divine mission, though not one of their own choosing, even the sign of the prophet Jonas. The meaning of which is, that as the prophetic office of Jonas was confirmed to the Ninevites, by his miraculous deliverance on the third day from the belly of the fish; so the divine authority of Christ should be confirmed to the Jews by his resurrection on the third day.

To

To this it may be objected, that Christ was not such a sign to the Jews as Jonas was to the Ninevites: because Jonas appeared publicly, and prophesied in their streets; but Christ shewed himself only to a few, to his own disciples.

This objection I propose to consider; and to remove, by shewing, that Christ gave as much, and indeed far more evidence to the Jews of his resurrection, than Jonah could possibly give to the Ninevites of his wonderful deliverance.

After this, I shall consider some of the reasons for which Christ shewed not himself openly to all the people.

But first it will be proper to give some account of the history of Jonas, to which our Lord alludes, and which will add light and strength to our following arguments.

The prophet Jonas was commanded by the Spirit of the Lord to go to Nineveh, and to prophesy against it for its great wickedness, and to threaten it with utter destruction.

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a great city, remote from the sea, lying on the east of Judæa, and about six hundred miles from it, which was a land-journey.

The

S E R M O N X.

191

The country of Israel and Judah lay extended not far from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Jonah rose up, to flee from the presence of the Lord. Why he was unwilling to go, is not clearly mentioned in the very short book which bears his name. But many probable reasons for it appear.

Jonas knew indeed for a certainty, that the Spirit of God was upon him, and that he had a prophetic errand; but God had not promised him any extraordinary and miraculous power by which he might prove his mission to others, nor given him any express assurance of his protection. Therefore he was unwilling to go, stranger as he was, to a city, great, powerful, rich, insolent, and wicked. He * feared that the inhabitants would treat him as a disturber of the public peace; at the best, as an enthusiast, and a man disordered in his senses; and would perhaps throw him into prison. He had before him the examples of prophets, who had been persecuted, imprisoned, slain by wicked Princes of Israel; and he had no reason to hope for better usage at Nineveh.

* *Διόνυς ὁ ἀντίδωρος*, says Josephus.

He

He was apprehensive also, that possibly, after all, his prophecy would not be accomplished, that God would perhaps spare the city, and that he then should be punished as a false prophet, or, at least, that he should be exposed to scorn, infamy, and disgrace. Jonas intimates, that he had been moved by some fears of this kind, when he afterwards expostulates with God, and says, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

God was pleased to put his faith thus to the trial; and his faith was weak. Swayed by these, or some motives like these, he fled from the face of the Lord. It may seem strange to us, that a prophet should imagine that he could conceal himself from omniscience, or go beyond the reach of omnipotence. But probably he supposed and hoped that the prophetic impulse would not exert itself out of the land of Israel, and that if he could but fly from thence, he should be at rest.

The Prophets had their weakneses and faults, like other men; and wanted sometimes to be excused

excused from performing the dangerous and painful office to which they were appointed. Jeremiah was in that condition, and * complained heavily; O Lord, thou art stronger than I.—I am in derision daily. Then said I, I will not make mention of God, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

Jonas therefore, to be released from his prophetic commission, went down to Joppa, a celebrated sea-port in the neighbourhood of Judæa, and entered into a ship which was going to trade at † Tarsish, or Spain. His orders were to take a long journey by land to the east; and he on the contrary took a long voyage by sea to the west.

A violent tempest arose, and Jonas, who knew that it was a divine judgment upon him, was flung into the sea at his own request, and swallowed up by a great fish, which cast him on the third day upon the shore, alive and unhurt. What shore it was the Scripture says not: perhaps it was at Joppa, where he took ship.

* Chap. xx. 9.

† Probably, *Hispania Bætica*.

To inquire what kind of fish it was, and in what manner Jonas could be preserved, seems to be a vain attempt. Who can account in a natural way for an event contrary to the ordinary course of nature? A miracle it was in all respects, but not beyond the power of God, who by himself or by the ministry of an Angel, could both make the sea-monster fit to contain the man, and preserve the man also in a situation, wherein without the divine interposition he must soon have perished.

Now Jonas had received a just correction for his disobedience, and a signal instance of God's mercy, and deferred no longer to perform his office. He had likewise, what he before wanted, proper credentials of his mission; for doubtless the fame of his punishment and of his deliverance flew before him, and reached Nineveh, ere he could arrive at it.

This is not a * loose conjecture, but the most probable reason that can be assigned for the dutiful and humble behaviour of the people of that city; for as soon as he delivered his dreadful message, that in a certain

* Irenæus iii. 22. says that Jonas converted the Ninevites, *conterritos ab eo signo, quod factum erat circa Jonam.*

number * of days Nineveh should be destroyed, all the inhabitants covered themselves with sackcloth, and fasted, and prayed, and cried to God, hoping that he would forgive them, as he had forgiven his prophet Jonas ; and God had pity on them, and destroyed them not.

At this Jonas was highly displeased.. His grief and his anger on this occasion were most unreasonable ; for his reputation was sufficiently secured by the things which had befallen him ; every one accounted him a man sent from God, and he was safe from insult and ill-usage. So that he ought to have rejoiced at the repentance and deliverance of so many thousands. If the Ninevites had thought that the sentence of God was irreversibile, they would have given themselves up to despair ;

* The Hebrew, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion have ; *Let forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown* ; the Septuagint, *τρεῖς ἡμέραι, three days* ; Josephus, *πάλιν ἐπέμπετο τὸν χρόνον, after a very short time* ; Justin Martyr, *forty-three days*, Dial. p. 366, 367. where see Thirlby.

Whether Nineveh was destroyed after as many years as were the days denounced by Jonas, we cannot say. We have not chronological evidence sufficient to direct us, but that a day often stands for a year in prophetic language, is certain. See *Ezech. iv. 4.* *Virringa* in *Isai. ii. p. 216.* *Jos. Mede, p. 598. 720.* *More, p. 119.*

Grotius on Revel. ii. 10. says that a day is never put for a year in the Prophets. He is much mistaken.

and if they hoped that amendment and supplications might prevail, they could not hate the prophet, or slight him, or use him ill, because the event had shewed his threats to be conditional. Therefore God gave him a rebuke for his froward behaviour, but a rebuke far more gentle than his peevish and passionate humour deserved.

From the history of Jonas it appears that the threatening denounced against Nineveh was conditional, that there was a tacit exception in case of repentance, that the Ninevites did repent and humble themselves, and that therefore the sentence was reversed, or rather suspended: for the Ninevites, as we may justly suppose, when the alarm was over, and the danger past in all appearance, did in process of time relapse into their old iniquities, and then followed the divine judgments: for we learn from sacred and profane history that the Medes and Babylonians utterly destroyed that great and ancient city, and so verified the prophecies of Jonas, Nahum, and Zephaniah against it.

I now proceed to shew that Christ gave as much, and indeed more evidence to the Jews of his resurrection, than Jonas could possibly give

give to the Ninevites of his wonderful deliverance.

Jonas indeed shewed himself openly to the Ninevites, and prophesied in their city, but he wrought no miracles there; and if we consider what hath been said concerning the situation of Nineveh, and its distance from the sea, we shall find no reason to suppose that any of the Ninevites were eye-witnesses of that which had befallen him; they heard the report of it perhaps from some who had seen part of it, perhaps from some who had conversed with those who saw it, and upon this evidence they believed.

Let us now compare with this the proofs which Christ gave to the Jews of his resurrection.

Nothing can be conceived more public and undeniably evident than his crucifixion, death, and burial. On the third day, in which he had declared that he would rise again, his Sepulchre was found empty, and the body was gone. Not long after, his disciples came forth in public, and declared that Christ was risen from the dead, that he had conversed with them forty days, and that in their sight he ascended into heaven. This St. Peter testified

to the Jews, in his first discourse to them, and the truth of this he confirmed to them by the best of arguments. To convince you, says he, that Christ is ascended into heaven, he hath shewed forth this which ye now see and hear; he hath enabled us to speak languages which we never had an opportunity of learning, and to discourse upon religious subjects in a manner surpassing our education and our abilities. This was proof enough; but to this he adds another equally strong and persuasive: If you, says he, will acknowledge along with us this Jesus for your Lord and Master, you also shall immediately receive some of these gifts and powers which you see conferred upon us. Greater certainty than this God himself cannot give; and surely man ought not to require.

Well therefore might our Lord say, The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold, ** more* than Jonas is here. More is done, and shall be done by me, to call this stubborn people to repentance, and to convince them of my authority, than was done by Jonas to the Ninevites.

† ὁ δὲ ἰησοῦς,

But

But still it may be said, * Why did not Christ shew himself openly to all the people, particularly to his enemies, to his accusers, and murderers, to confound or to convince them? I answer:

1. Christ did not shew himself to all the Jews, because it was not necessary for their conversion, because the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, and the miracles wrought by them at Jerusalem were sufficient proofs of his resurrection. And as there was no reason why Christ should shew himself to the Jews for their satisfaction; so neither was it necessary for our satisfaction who live in these latter ages. The evidence which we have of it would not have been the greater; for there were so many thousands of Jews and Gentiles converted within forty years after Christ's ascension, that if the unbelieving Jews had been converted and added to the number, the increase of the evidence arising from thence would have been next to nothing.

2. Christ did not shew himself to the unbelieving Jews, because they were upon all ac-

* It is the objection of Celsus, to which Origen gives answers different from those which I have used. See p. 98. *Contr. Cels.*

counts unworthy of such favour; they could not reasonably expect it from him, towards whom they had shewed so much ingratitude, spite, malice, and cruelty; and deserved not to have their curiosity and their stubbornness so far gratified.

Add to this, that in proofs of religious truths, when persons are not contented with that which is sufficient in the opinion of fair inquirers, but desire still something more, this something more is never to be fixed, but varies and increales according to the extravagant fancies of perverse men. If our Lord ought to have shewed himself to all the Jews of his own times, he should for the same reason have shewed himself to the Gentiles; and so to all men, to the end of the world, to convert some, to satisfy and confirm others, and to recal others from a wicked life; and thus faith would be no longer what it is, and what it ought to be.

3. If Christ had appeared openly in the presence of his enemies, and ascended into heaven before their eyes, it is not certain that this would have reduced them to silence, and have put a stop to their objections. They who had said that he was possessed of the Devil, and wrought

wrought his beneficent miracles by the assistance of the Devil, might have said, on this occasion, that an evil spirit had taken his body out of the grave, and * entered into it, and carried it about Jerusalem for some days, to make the people believe his resurrection, and then had conveyed it through the air to some unknown place.

4. If Christ had appeared to the unbelieving Jews, there is no just reason to conclude that they would have heartily and sincerely embraced the Gospel. If Christ had given them the same proofs which he gave to his Apostles, possibly they would have believed his resurrection: but to believe that Christ was risen, and to become his servants, and obey his precepts, were two different things; the first did not imply the second, nor is there sufficient cause to think that such conviction would have made them honest men.

We find that in the days of Christ and of his Apostles, there were persons who saw the miracles which were wrought in confirmation of the

* The Devil performed such a thing at the command of Cornel. Agrippa. So the Jesuit Delrio assures us, *Disq. Magic.* L. II. Qu. 29. Sect. I. and, for aught I know, he might be fool enough to believe it,

Gospel,

Gospel, and who acknowledged in their hearts that they were divine works, and yet either did not openly profess it, or apostatized from it, and opposed it, after they had professed it; that some forsook the Gospel, to escape persecution, and others from worse and baser motives. They who fell away through fear were less guilty; for fear is an imperious passion, and drives men to do things which they detest, and for which they are afterwards very sorry; but they who were seduced by their vices, were sinners of whose amendment there was little or no hope. St. Peter denied his master, but it was through fear, and by surprise, and therefore he obtained pardon, and returned to his obedience: if he had denied him for thirty pieces of silver, he would have been quite lost to God and to goodness.

Let us suppose the unbelieving Jews to have been of this wicked temper; let us suppose that by conversing with Christ after his resurrection, they had been fully convinced of it, and that they had either concealed their faith, or had joined themselves to the Christian Church only for a time, and then had rejected the Gospel; if they had thus behaved themselves, it must be acknowledged that such proselytes would have been of no service to our religion, and that

Christ

Christ would have shewed himself to them to no purpose.

There is room to suspect that the chief persons amongst the Jews, who opposed the Apostles at their first preaching, did believe that Christ was risen, or thought that it might be true, or at least were not fully persuaded that it was false; there is room, I say, to suspect this, from their compact with the soldiers, from the foolish and inconsistent story which they raised, that the Disciples had stolen his body, and from their lenity towards some of those disciples, whom they punished with less rigour than might have been expected.

Perhaps it will be said, If they believed the resurrection of Christ, they could not have been so wicked and perverse; they would have been afraid of offending him, lest he should destroy them.

But history, sacred and pagan, ancient and modern, will afford us examples of men, who have done many wicked things against conviction and conscience, and who have from time to time been plagued with apprehensions that they should suffer for their iniquities in this world or in the next, or in both. Besides, as the miracles of Christ had all been of the gentle

gentle and merciful kind, the Jews were the less alarmed with a fear of his indignation.

It is easy to imagine how the Jews might have been brought to embrace the Gospel by a few miracles of severity. For example; If the Apostles after Christ's resurrection had threatened the Jews that if they did not immediately acknowledge him, God would deal with them as he had dealt with the Ægyptians of old, and their first-born should all die in one night, and if this had come to pass, they who survived would have made no delay to profess themselves Christians. But the divine Providence did not think fit thus to compel men to come in, and to frighten them into Christianity. To a sufficient evidence is joined those gentle means of persuasion which permitted faith to be an act of choice, and the result of a sound judgment, a tractable temper, and a virtuous disposition.

5. If Christ had shewed himself to all the nation, and to all the strangers in Judæa, and thereby had converted both Jews and Romans, and if the Christian Religion had been thus established suddenly, and without opposition, it is certain that we in these ages should not have had so good proofs of the truth of our religion as we now have. Many objections might have been

been made to a religion embraced by the powers of this world, propagated under their protection and authority, established by those whom it was not safe to disoblige, and attended with honour and profit. But the speedy and extensive progress of the Gospel, though it was opposed by the great and learned, and the hardships which its first professors endured with so much meekness and courage; and their perseverance in a faith which at that time was not consistent with their temporal interests, these are perpetual testimonies of the truth of our religion.

6. But lastly, if Christ had appeared publicly, and conversed for forty days with the Jewish nation, there is reason to suppose that it would have been a hindrance to the propagation of the Gospel.

The Jews were then in subjection to the Romans; they did about that time expect the Messias; they imagined and hoped that the Messias would be a temporal prince, who should deliver them from the oppressive dominion of the Gentiles, and make them a powerful and a glorious nation. Accordingly, many impostors arose amongst them, from the time of that Herod in whose reign Christ was born, to the destruction

of Jerusalem, who stirred up the people to insurrections, and who with their deluded followers suffered what they well deserved. We read in the New Testament, that when the multitudes saw the wonders which Christ wrought, particularly his feeding of thousands miraculously, they presently thought to set him up for their king, supposing that they should easily subdue their oppressors and enemies under such a leader. Upon this, Christ withdrew himself from them, and during the whole course of his ministry took a particular care to give no offence to the magistrate. His meek and blameless behaviour seems to have been acknowledged by the Romans; for when the Jews accused him to Pilate of making himself a king in opposition to Cæsar, and of stirring up the people to a revolt, Pilate was sensible that it was a calumny, and openly declared him innocent.

Hence it may be supposed that if Christ had shewed himself to all the nation, after his resurrection, the multitude would have received him as the Messias, as their king, and would have risen against the Romans; and the ensuing wars would have been laid to the charge of the Christian religion, which upon that account must have become odious to the Romans, and have been

been opposed by them in all their dominions.

These are ill effects, which could not have been prevented, unless many miracles had been wrought for that very purpose, and consequently such astonishing and overbearing evidence of the truth of the Gospel had been given to the world as none besides madmen could resist; which, as we before observed, destroys the nature of faith.

In a much better manner did our religion make its first public appearance. Christ, after his resurrection, shewed himself to a sufficient number of witnesses; after he had conversed with them forty days, he sent them to preach the Gospel, and ascended into heaven. Concerning Christ, they taught that he was the Lawgiver, the Teacher, and the Saviour, and would be the Judge of mankind; that he was a king also, but that his kingdom was of a spiritual nature, not of this world; and that obedience to his laws was perfectly consistent with obedience to the higher Powers here on earth; so that no prince had any thing to fear from the Christian religion, which diminished none of his rights. Nor did it lessen the rights of subjects, as is weakly or dishonestly affirmed by some vile flatterers, who have

have endeavoured to establish systems of passive obedience and non-resistance, of tyranny and slavery, from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The Jews behaved themselves towards the Apostles, as they had behaved towards Christ, ever accusing them to the Gentiles as pestilent fellows, movers of sedition, and enemies to Cæsar; but the Roman magistrates saw that it was a false and malicious accusation, and looked upon the Apostles and their followers as upon a new sect amongst the Jews, differing from their countrymen in matters purely speculative and religious, who being quiet subjects deserved to enjoy the same liberty which at that time was granted to the Jews. This appears from the behaviour of Lyfias, and Felix, and Festus, and Gallio, to St. Paul, related in the acts of the Apostles; where we also find that the Apostle, when he had appealed to Cæsar, and was sent to Rome, continued there two years, preaching the Gospel to all who would hear it, no man forbidding him. Thus the Christian religion in its beginnings met with no great opposition from the Romans; the persecutions which its professors then underwent, arose chiefly from the Jews.

SERMON

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S E R M O N XI.

II COR. xii. 7.

Left I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.

ST. Paul met with great and constant opposition in his ministry from Pagans and from unconverted Jews, but he experienced a more vexatious contradiction from half brethren and false brethren, from Jews converted indeed to Christianity, but yet stubbornly attached to their old prejudices, and absurdly tenacious of their expiring rites and ceremonies. These men made it their business to lessen and defame him, and to render his preaching unsuccessful, and to draw away his disciples from him, representing him as an enemy to the Jews, a despiser of the Law of Moses, a companion, a friend and a patron of the Gentiles,

an upstart and an intruder into the number of the Apostles. St. Paul therefore found himself often under the unavoidable and the hard necessity of acting what he calls the part of a fool; that is, of commending and extolling himself, and of proving that he was beyond all comparison superior to these injudicious or envious men, and as a teacher, not inferior to any Apostle, how eminent soever; not to Peter, the first in dignity; not to John, the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ.

His arguments in support of his own sacred office and authority are set forth with that strength and vivacity which were natural to him, with that just indignation which so base an opposition would excite in a man conscious that he deserved no such treatment, with that security and superiority which attend a disputant who knows his proofs to be clear and unanswerable, and with the vehemence and zeal of a teacher of truth who is afraid lest his disciples should be seduced, and his pious endeavours defeated.

He observes that he was miraculously converted, and called by Jesus Christ appearing to him; that he was instructed in the Christian religion, and appointed to teach it, not by men,

but by the Lord Jesus Christ himself; that he had as many spiritual gifts conferred upon him, that he had wrought as many miracles as any Apostle; that in his ministry he had been as diligent as others, and indeed more diligent, had converted more persons, had founded more Churches, had endured more labours, and had undergone more afflictions and greater sufferings than any of Christ's disciples; that he had likewise set a remarkable and uncommon example of self-denial and disinterestedness, in not receiving even a maintenance from several of those whom he taught, and that at different times he had laboured with his own hands to get his bread. To this he adds, that he had been favoured with visions and revelations; that he had been taken up once into Paradise, and another time into the third heaven.

These extraordinary deserts on his side, and these extraordinary favours and privileges so largely conferred upon him, were in one respect dangerous temptations, and such as might insensibly lead the wisest and the humblest man upon earth into the confines at least of pride and vanity, and now and then suggest a conceited reflection upon his own eminence and superiority, especially when he was provoked

to it by ill usage, by flights and censures, and compelled to compare himself with his opposers.

Therefore, to all these favours bestowed upon our great Apostle, God was pleased to add another, namely affliction and discipline; for he chasteneth him whom he loveth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. This chastisement is called by St. Paul, a thorn in the flesh, and it was intended to remind him of his weakness, and to preserve him from arrogance; and the moral sense of it was, Be not high-minded, but fear.

Lest I should be exalted above measure; that is, lest I should think too well of myself, and fancy that I had a right to God's favours, and imagine that I surpassed others as much in moral accomplishments and in goodness, as I do in spiritual gifts, in visions and revelations; in the success which hath attended my ministry, and in the numbers which I have brought into the Church of Christ; lest I should be thus puffed up, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh.

* This thorn in the flesh must have been, in general, something that had its seat in

* Some of these remarks are taken from a Discourse of Bishop Bull on the same text.

the

the body, something that was uneasy and painful.

But it could not be the ill offices and the opposition of wicked men, and the afflictions and the persecutions which he endured, like other Christians. This, he knew, was then the lot and the portion of all the servants of Jesus Christ, and from this he would not have expected or prayed so earnestly to be released. It must have been some grievance more personal and particular.

What was it then? I answer, It could not have been any vicious desire; a thing which should not even have been mentioned; if some injudicious persons had not adopted this * absurd notion. When St. Paul recommends continence and chastity to the Corinthians, he says, I wish that all Christians were like myself, in that respect. It is not to be supposed that God should send such temptations upon him, or that this aged, sober, chaste, distressed and laborious Apostle should have been exposed to

* And yet, as absurd as it is, some may perhaps choose to retain it, as affording a sort of excuse for themselves when they yield to the same inclinations which they impute to the Apostle. I mean those persons who extol faith and depreciate morality, and whose religion often dwells in the brain, and descends not *infra zonam*.

them, or that he should call it an infirmity, a name much too civil for it, as he afterwards calls it, or that he should even glory and boast of it, as he declares that he would. Nor indeed could it be a proper remedy to cure him of pride; for one sin doth not usually expel another, any more than Satan casts out Satan; or if it doth, it leaves the sinner as it found him, in the condition of an insolvent debtor, who borrows from one creditor to pay another.

Some understand it to be Original Sin; and it is matter of astonishment that any man should ever have so understood it. The thorn, in some sense, was given of God, as it seems; but God is the author of no bad gift. The thorn was given to St. Paul in particular; but original sin, if it belongs to any of us, belongs to all of us. If by original sin be meant the sin of Adam imputed to all his posterity, and making them guilty in the sight of God, it belongs to no one; it is a dream and a false interpretation of Scripture: if by original sin be meant the imperfections and the defects of human nature, and the mortality which Adam brought upon himself and upon his posterity, this indeed is true, but it hath no more to do with St. Paul's thorn in the flesh, than

than with his journey from Jerusalem to Damascus.

As it plainly could be nothing of the lewd and immoral kind, it must have been something of a * bodily defect and disease, which he laboured under, and which made him appear mean and despicable in the eyes of those who judge of another merely from his outside, from his manner, his address, and his appearance.

The ancient Christian writers, who lived nearest to the time of the Apostle, constantly understood it so, and might probably have learned it from a tradition preserved in those places where St. Paul had preached the Gospel. But what chiefly confirms it is that the Apostle himself seems to explain it so in other passages of his Epistles. He says to his disciples the Galatians, Ye know that through infirmity in

* Erasmus is against us, and delivers his sentiments in a very positive manner:

"*Nec enim audiendos arbitror, qui non minus indocte quam impudenter solent illud objicere; Virtus in infirmitate perficitur; SOMNIANTES Paulum gravi capitis dolori fuisse obnoxium, cum ille infirmitatem, vel animi tentationem, vel quod vero propius est, improborum hominum molestam insectationem appellet. Atque idem ille Paulus, inter Apostolicas dotes donum curationis recensuit.*" *De Laude Medicinæ.*

It is not we who *nod* and *dream*; but *bonus dormitat Erasmus.*

the flesh I preached the Gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh you despised not, nor rejected, but received me as an Angel of God, even as Jesus Christ. The thorn in the flesh, and the temptation in the flesh, mean the same thing. Again he says to the Corinthians, that one of the objections which his adversaries used to make to him was this, His bodily presence is weak, and his speech is contemptible. Again he says, We are weak and ye are strong, and I was with you in weakness.

Laying these things together, we may collect that this Apostle had an infirm constitution, a bodily disorder, an ill state of health, which might at certain times affect his speech and his delivery, so that there was something in his whole appearance that tended to depress him, and to make him less venerable.

This thorn in the flesh is called a messenger of Satan; the meaning of which seems to be that God, who hath Spirits good and evil at his command, and fulfils his purposes by both, when he thinks fit, gave liberty to Satan to afflict St. Paul. We find that in those days the Apostles had, amongst other extraordinary gifts, a power of delivering wicked Christians

to Satan, or of inflicting bodily pains and disorders upon them, to cure them of their spiritual diseases, when milder methods were ineffectual; and it is St. Paul who hath occasionally made mention of this correction, and who himself, as an Apostle, inflicted it sometimes upon the disobedient. The same method God thought proper to follow in chastizing this great Apostle, not by way of punishment, for he had not incurred it by his behaviour, but by way of prevention, and because he was in danger of being tempted to spiritual pride.

For this, says the Apostle, I besought the Lord thrice. He must have been very uneasy upon this account, and have laboured under some grievance that lay heavy upon him, since he prayed so earnestly for relief.

In all probability it was not the pain that he felt, or any contempt or censure which his condition might draw upon him from wicked or rash and injudicious men, that thus affected him. He was too wise and prudent, too good and too patient to have been so much moved by such trials. The true reason of his sorrow and anxiety seems to have been a fear lest the cause of religion, which he had so much at heart, should suffer by it, lest his infirmities should

should obstruct his preaching of the Gospel, and render him less able to do good, and less prevalent in his endeavours to convert and save others. He knew that there is a great deal in the outward appearance, the person, the countenance, the voice, the manner, and the address, to bespeak the favour, the attention, and the respect of the populace and of the public.

For this, says he, I besought the Lord thrice.

If it be asked, who is meant by the Lord? it seems most probable from the context, that it was not God the Father, but * Jesus Christ.

For the Lord answered St. Paul, and spake to him; but God the Father never thus appeared and manifested himself in this manner. All the visible or audible manifestations of God, of which mention is made in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, seem to have been appearances of the *Word* or the *Son* of God, acting and speaking in his Father's name; as after the incarnation he acted and spake in his own person; as when he appeared to St. Stephen, to St. Paul, and to other Saints and Disciples. In

* Schlictingius, and other Socinians, allow that this is a prayer directed to Jesus Christ.

this the ancient Christians and most of the
* moderns are agreed.

Secondly, according to the common style of
the New Testament, the word *God* means the
Father, and the word *Lord* means Jesus Christ,

Thirdly, the Lord said to St. Paul, My grace
is sufficient for thee. This word *grace* is also
commonly used of Christ, the grace of Christ,
and the love of God, and the communion of the
Spirit.

Fourthly, The Lord here promiseth to St.
Paul his grace and his strength; and therefore
the Apostle immediately adds, I will glory in
my infirmities, that the power of Christ may
rest upon me.

Christ shewed himself to St. Paul, when he
converted him, and appeared to him afterwards
at other times, and upon other occasions; and
we may suppose that he did so now.

St. Paul being under much uneasiness on ac-
count of this thorn in the flesh, and remember-
ing that Christ himself before his sufferings

* Except those who admit not the pre-existence of Christ, as
the *Word* or the *Son* of God. But they who are not influenced
by this hypothesis will find no cause to reject this very old
and probable opinion,

prayed

prayed earnestly to his Father three times that the cup might pass from him, followed the example, and besought Jesus Christ with great earnestness three times that he might be relieved from this disorder.

Our Saviour then spake to his Apostle, and gave him this kind answer, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Be patient and contented; it is enough that I love thee, that I am always with thee, to assist thee in the performance of thy office and ministry. Thy weakness and infirmities shall not hinder thee from being a successful preacher of the Gospel; and then these very imperfections will shew forth my power, and prove to the world that by the most incompetent and unpromising means and instruments I am able to bring about the good of my Church, and the establishment of my Kingdom.

St. Paul, upon receiving this answer, not only humbly acquiesced in his Lord's determination, but declares that it was matter of joy to him, and that he would thenceforward glory in his infirmities, since they were not only not detrimental, but serviceable to Christianity, and tended to the good of the Church, and to the edification of his brethren.

It

It seems probable that this bodily infirmity of St. Paul was upon some extraordinary occasions suspended and removed for a time; as when he pleaded his cause before Princes and Roman Governors, by whom he was favourably heard; and when with Barnabas he discoursed to the Pagans of Lystra, who took them to be Gods in an human form, and him to be Mercury, the God of eloquence *.

Indeed, when we consider the infirmities of St. Paul, together with his innumerable toils and sufferings, we cannot account it less than a miracle that he was able for so long a time to do what he did, and to bear what he underwent; so that his bodily weakness, instead of being an objection to his character, afforded a proof to all who knew him that he must have been supported by a divine power in an extraordinary manner.

The moral reflections and practical uses arising from this subject are various; and I can only just review them, and touch upon them.

1. We see the very dangerous nature of pride, to which the best of persons are obnoxious,

* Longinus, in a Fragment, amongst the Orators reckons Paul of Tarsus.

since

Since such a man as St. Paul stood in need of some corrective to humble him, to check and to damp any conceited thought that might arise in his mind from reflecting upon his great labours and services, his high station in the Church, and the extraordinary gifts which he had received. This chastening and this bodily weakness had its due effect upon him; and one cannot but admire that sober and wise moderation, and that singular discretion, when he talks of himself. He represents his own exemplary conduct, his unblameable and disinterested behaviour amongst his converts, when he would animate them to follow his example; but then he ascribes it to the grace of God and the Spirit of God working with him, and helping his infirmities. He magnifies his Apostolical powers, when he was under a necessity of exerting his authority to repress the insolence of his adversaries, and to drive false teachers out of his flock; but at the same time he humbles himself by frequent acknowledgments of the crime which he had committed before his conversion, in persecuting the Church of Christ. On this account he places himself amongst the greatest sinners, only pleading his ignorance at that time, not as a sufficient excuse, but as an extenuation

uation of his fault, for the sake of which he obtained mercy; and then he proposeth himself as an encouragement to penitent sinners. Thus he makes use of his past transgressions, of his spiritual gifts, of his religious behaviour, of his bodily infirmities, of his afflictions and persecutions, his labours and his industry, to comfort, to instruct, to reprove, to warn, and to reform others.

If we have not so many gifts and graces as St. Paul had, and so by reason of our imperfections are not in so much danger of conceit and vanity as he might be, yet from imaginary accomplishments real pride will often spring up, and we have not the Apostle's goodness and discretion, to enable us to repel such temptations. We should therefore beware of every kind of pride, and like him keep it in subjection by a serious and frequent consideration of our many defects. Motives and inducements to humility we can never want, if we deal fairly and honestly with ourselves, and compare our practice with our duty.

2. We see from this, and from many other places in the New Testament, that the Apostles had not the power of working miracles at their own discretion, but had some particular impulse of

of the Holy Spirit directing them when and how this gift should be exercised. For St. Paul could not cure himself of this bodily disease, nor could he give his beloved disciple Timothy a better state of health, nor relieve some of his friends when they were sick. If then even in the Apostolical days miracles were not daily lavished, but performed moderately, and sparingly, and with a kind of sober frugality, we have great reason to suspect that wanton and endless profusion of miracles pretended to have been wrought in following ages, often in a most fantastical manner, and to no good end that we can discern, and often for bad ends and base purposes.

We all desire temporal peace and happiness, and would willingly shun every thing that gives us uneasiness and pain; and these desires are natural and not sinful. St. Paul also earnestly wished to be delivered from his infirmities, and to have more health and strength, and vigour of body. But from his example we may learn to regulate these desires, and not to expect that things will fall out just as we could wish. We may pray to God, as he did, either to obtain a present good, or to be delivered from a present evil: but such prayers must always be conditional, and the condition must be either

expressed

expressed or understood, if it shall seem good to God. Perhaps it will not seem good to him, and then we must not think ourselves hardly and unkindly used, nor imagine that our requests are unsuccessful, merely because they are not granted. If God should not deliver us from temporal evil, yet if he intends it for our benefit, if he gives us strength to support it, if he bestows upon us other blessings to counterbalance it, and if he will in due time reward our faith and resignation, our submissive temper and humble acquiescence, we are infinite gainers upon the whole.

Consider the case of St. Paul. He underwent something that was very grievous, no doubt, since he begged three times with repeated importunity to be relieved. For when he was scourged, and cast into prison, and fettered, and beaten, and stoned, and shipwrecked, and driven from place to place, and deprived even of the necessities of life, he endured it all with intrepidity and resolution, and never once desired to be exempted from such severe trials. When it was revealed to him, or when he plainly foresaw that he should soon

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suffer

suffer martyrdom, he speaks to his disciples, not only with calm composure, but with pleasure and exultation, that he should leave this world and go to his Lord and Master. But this thorn in the flesh, this bodily disorder grieved him much, and yet he was not relieved from it, and in all probability he carried it with him to the grave, afflicted, and yet acquiescing, as well he might, in the will of his Lord. Suppose we were exactly in his case, and were to receive the same answer from Jesus Christ, and he should say to one of us, Be satisfied with this, that I am thy friend and protector, that I love thee, and will always take care of thee; certainly such an answer would be worth all the health, all the strength, all the respect, and all the worldly prosperity that any man ever enjoyed.

4. This leads me, lastly, to observe that in the present state of things, a mixture of temporal good and evil is best for us upon the whole. An uninterrupted flow of prosperity, as it is hardly possible in the nature of things, so it is not expedient for strangers, and sojourners here below, who want some motives to remind them of the end for which they are designed,
and

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and of the home to which they are repairing, and to keep them from trifling, and dallying with their great concerns, and from making every frivolous and fading object the object of their affections.

A Pagan moralist hath represented the folly of an attachment to this world almost as strongly as a Christian could express it. Thou art a passenger, says he, and thy ship hath put into an harbour for a few hours. The tide and the wind serves, and the pilot calls thee to depart; and thou art amusing thyself, and gathering shells and pebbles upon the shore, till they set sail without thee.

So is every Christian, who being upon his voyage to an happy eternity, delays and loiters, and thinks and acts as if he were to dwell here for ever.

An infirm habit of body, and a frequent return of sickness is reckoned, and is deservedly reckoned amongst temporal calamities; and yet it is not without some alleviations and advantages, which may teach us to be resigned under it, if it prove our lot and portion.

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It often keeps persons out of the way and the reach of many temptations; as on the contrary, health and strength, and a flow of spirits lead them to gaiety and dissipation, to everlasting amusements and diversions, and sometimes to worse things, to mischievous undertakings and vicious actions.

It teaches compassion and charity towards the unhappy and miserable; as on the contrary, they who are strangers to pain and sorrow are seldom disposed to pity it much in others.

It is usually joined to seriousness and contemplation, to thinking and reasoning; and thus the capacity is enlarged and the understanding improved, and though the body be weak, the mind is active; and it is obvious to observe that the most sickly are not the least ingenious.

It makes the world less engaging and less dear, and thereby teaches and enables us to live more prudently, and to depart more willingly.

Christians are directed to pray to God for all things, and to return thanks to him for all things, because if they endeavour to serve

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God constantly and faithfully, nothing very disastrous shall befall them, but whether in prosperity or in adversity, or, which is more common, in a mixture and vicissitude of both, all things shall, by the divine blessing and appointment, work together for their advantage.

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God constantly and incessantly holding very
difficulties shall best stand, but whether in
prosperity or in adversity, and which is more
convenient, in a mixture and vicissitude of both,
all things shall, by the divine blessing and
appointment, work together for their advancement.

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S E R M O N XII.

TITUS iii. 2.

To speak evil of no man.

TH E R E are several reasons for which Christians ought to be exhorted to refrain from evil-speaking.

First, it is not only a mean and shameful, but a pernicious, fault; it produces much harm in society, and is a cause why many live hateful and hating one another, and die in the same unfriendly disposition.

Secondly, it is a common and wide-spread fault, and few, very few are entirely free from it. It is not confined to wicked and profane persons; it is to be found in some measure even in those who have their virtues, their good and useful and amiable qualities and accomplishments, who live soberly and honestly, who are just and true in their dealings, who love their friends and are active to serve and oblige them,

who are not uncharitable to the poor, who have a sense of religion, and worship God both in public and in private.

Thirdly, they who are addicted to it, either seldom reflect upon its odious nature, or are not sensible when and how often they thus offend, or have several plausible though vain excuses to justify themselves.

Upon all these accounts therefore it is necessary that it should be set in a true light, and have its share of rebuke amongst other sins from which we are commanded in Scripture to abstain ourselves, and to dissuade others.

Evil-speaking consists in spreading reports to the disadvantage of our neighbour; and of this fault there are three distinct kinds or degrees.

The worst kind of it is to spread lies of our own invention concerning others.

The next is to report things to their disadvantage, of the truth of which we are not sufficiently assured.

The lowest degree is to say of them that evil which we know to be true.

There is no occasion to prove and expose the folly and dishonesty of the two former kinds. It would be losing time and words. I shall therefore chiefly discourse of the latter, and shew

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shew how blameable even this is for the most part. I say, how blameable it is for the most part, because we should not condemn it in the gross, and without distinction. To speak what we know concerning the faults of others is one of those acts which by a change of circumstances becomes lawful or unlawful, and therefore we should first examine and consider in what cases it may be allowable.

They who are forwardly and impertinently busy in detecting smaller offences for the sake of lucre, undertake a disreputable office, and receive part of their just reward in the contempt and abomination which is usually bestowed upon them. But where the common good and the wise laws of society absolutely require it, it is allowable, indeed it is a duty to make known the crimes of others which we can prove. Pity, and gratitude, and friendship, and every affection should give place to the love which we owe to virtue and to our country. It must be confessed that to one who has any generosity and good nature, few things can be more disagreeable than to be an informer or accuser; but there may be cases in which it must be undergone. The Law of God expressly commanded the Jews to discover any person, even

even a brother, a friend, or a wife, who should attempt to seduce others to idolatry, which in that government was high treason; the laws of our country, and of all counfries, upon some very great occasions require a like behaviour; and indeed charity itself forbids us to conceal what cannot be kept secret, without grievous injury to the public. But this is a duty which we are seldom called upon and compelled to practise.

The Roman Law * says; Let no one be forced against his will to accuse or prosecute; which for the most part is reasonable, though liable to exceptions.

Under the general rule, that we may speak of the faults of others when the common interest demands it, are contained these particular cases:

If we are injured in our reputation, it is lawful for us to clear our character, though we do it by casting infamy upon him who has defamed us. We are no where commanded to love our neighbour more than ourselves; and it is much better in all respects that a slanderer should by our detection of him be exposed, than that we by his calumnies should be misrepresented.

* *Inuitus agere vel accusare nemo cogatur*, says Dioclesian, *Cod. Lib. III. Tit. VII.*

So, if we be wronged, not only in our reputation by slander, but in any other manner affecting our fortunes and our welfare, to discover those injuries and complain of them, that we may obtain our right, and be secured from such ill usage for the future, or that the offending person may be brought to a sense of his sin, and to a better mind, can be no fault, if it be done with due temper and with moderation.

And if in the defence of our own good name, of our own property, we may proceed thus far in proclaiming the faults of others, we may do as much for our neighbour, when he suffers in like manner, because it is our duty to love him as ourselves.

This regard which we owe to mankind will also justify us in speaking of the obvious faults of others, when by it we may preserve any person from great evil and mischief. If one be in danger of falling into bad company, and by their instigation and example into wickedness and ruin, to mention to him the vices of those whom he ought to shun, can be no fault, or breach of charity.

We may also observe that there are offences committed daily in the world so notorious and scandalous, that they can neither be concealed

nor

nor excused. To be afraid to mention such offences in common discourse, would be to lay too rigid and scrupulous a restraint upon our tongue.

And again, as young persons are more affected by examples than by precepts, if a parent or master, dissuading a youth from this or that vice, should point out to him some person impudently barefaced in the practice of it, and shew him the bad consequences of such a behaviour, this would not properly be called evil-speaking.

These are particular cases in which to say what we certainly know concerning the faults of others, is either a duty, or no crime. And to these, more, perhaps, might be added. It is in this as in some other actions; a change of circumstances alters the nature of it, and makes it good, or evil, or indifferent; and these circumstances are sometimes such, that it is no easy matter to fix the exact bounds between right and wrong. But to this general rule we ought to keep, namely, to be very cautious and reserved in speaking even the ill of others which

*Infuevit pater optimus hoc me,
Ut fugerem exemplis vitiorum quæque notando.*

Cum me hortaretur, parce, &c.

Horat. Serm. l. iv. 195.

See *Locke on Education*, § 82. 94.

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we know to be true, and to abstain from it, unless we can shew a just cause; and that for several reasons, which I shall now set before you.

1. We should not be too forward to publish the faults of others, because it is no sufficient excuse for us, that what we say is true, and that they against whom we speak deserve such usage. This excuse seems to be the strong-hold of the better and more moderate sort of evil-speakers, who think that they do nothing amiss, when they can prove what they affirm, and when the person whom they censure is really worthy of correction. They consider not that they assume an undue power, and that they have not a general and unlimited right to speak against evil-doers, and to deliver them up to shame and infamy. If every one should take this liberty, the ill effects would soon be visible, and the offender would often suffer more than is fit, his character being thus exposed to the rabble, to be worried at their discretion. Resentments, retaliations, grudges, and quarrels would unavoidably ensue, and human society would be what some have imagined of a state of nature, a state of war, and a trial of skill who should be best able to plague and expose his neighbour.

By

By publishing the faults of others, they not only judge but punish. Now let us suppose that the person punished deserves all this, yet how have they deserved so ill of themselves, that they must needs administer the correction? Let offenders punish offenders, since it will always be so. Let it be left to tale-bearers, to busy bodies, to the spiteful, the envious, and the malicious; they will do it sufficiently.

And here one cannot well omit the mention of a fault, nearly related to evil-speaking, but more pernicious, and that is evil-writing, or Satire, in which the defects, weaknesses, indiscretions, follies and vices, not of corrupted human nature, but of particular persons, is exposed to public view. If these writers can say for themselves that they keep exactly to truth, yet they exercise an authority to which they have no legal and just claim. But they seldom have even that excuse to plead; they often bestow their censures as interest, partiality, ignorance, spleen, and prejudice direct, and are usually the most malicious revilers of some, and the most sordid flatterers of others. Thus a person shall presume to pass sentence upon his neighbour's reputation, who is not fit to open the cause, and shall set himself up for a Judge, who has not the quali-

qualifications requisite even for an ordinary Evidence.

And of this tribe of men the most odious are those, who shoot their arrows from the dark, who wear a mask, not out of modesty, but of fear and self-preservation, who themselves write without a name, and abuse innocent persons by name; a crime which deserves other correction than words.

I will not say that every thing which may be called Satire is unlawful, or lay so hard a restraint upon Poets, and indeed upon Divines too; for Sermons against Vice, Error, Folly, and Fanaticism, may perhaps be thought to fall under that denomination. Fables and Parables are a species of Satire, and an useful way of correcting mankind and conveying good instruction. Characters of pride, conceit, folly, avarice, impudence, &c. may be presented to public view, and perhaps they may be drawn from the life; but when the Original is not pointed out, no one is obliged to take it upon himself, or should pretend to be offended.

2. Another argument against censoriousness is contained in this plain precept of the Gospel; Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye so unto them.

Every

Every person has his defects, and yet loves himself notwithstanding his imperfections. He takes it ill of those who deride or expose his faults, and he thinks himself obliged to those who excuse or defend him. He calls the former his enemies, and the latter his friends. Thus nature acts within us, and reason adds, that we ought to be such towards others as we wish them to be towards us.

Charity in men, like mercy in God, is a perfection which we admire and esteem, especially when we stand much in need of it; then he to whom much hath been forgiven, will usually love much. One part of Charity consists in passing over and covering transgressions, when it may be done without injury to others, and the divine mercy displays itself in the promise which God hath made that he will blot out our transgressions, and remember them no more, if we amend, and in particular if we deal with men as we desire that he should deal with us. As we hope therefore at the great day of accounts to have the follies and failings of our life pardoned, and not exposed to our shame and confusion before that solemn assembly of men and angels, we must take care not

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to be extreme ourselves to mark and to expose what is done amiss by others.

3. We should not accustom ourselves to discourse about the faults of our neighbour, because it may betray us by degrees into a worse kind of evil speaking. From saying every thing to his disadvantage that we can prove to be true, from omitting no opportunity to indulge this humour, when we can plead some excuse for it, we shall perhaps proceed to tell what we learn by uncertain hearsays, and thence to make large additions of our own invention, which is the height of slander and calumny. By much speaking upon useful subjects, we learn the art of discoursing with fluency and justness; and by much talking in the censorious way, we learn the art, such as it is, of evil speaking; with this difference, that the latter is by far the easier to be acquired, our irregular passions greatly assisting us, and small pains and abilities being requisite to get any bad habit.

4. We should not be forward to expose the faults of others, because by so doing we may bring upon them a punishment too heavy for the offence. Our words we account to be mere sounds, which can do little or no hurt, and yet be they very swords; they are often

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most

most pernicious instruments of mischief, and inflict wounds never to be healed. By spreading about one single fault of another we may perhaps raise him up irreconcilable enemies, we may lessen very much the peace of his mind, his reputation, his fortunes, and the welfare of an innocent family who depend upon him; and thus may we contribute to bring him into inconveniences and troubles which bear no proportion to his folly, and which he may no more deserve to suffer than we ourselves.

5. We should be cautious how we censure others, because we may misrepresent them, and yet say nothing of them that is not true. Men have their bad and their good qualities, and, in forming a judgment of them, as much regard at least should be had to the good as to the bad ones. By exposing all that is faulty in a man, and suppressing all that is commendable, we may make him appear far worse than he is, and transform an imperfect mortal into a detestable creature.

A person hath committed a fault, and we publish it. Perhaps he has been sensible of it, has repented, and is amended. God hath forgiven it; and shall not men cease to throw it in his face? They ought; but very often they do

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do not: God pardons a transgression, when a new course of life follows it, and there is joy in heaven at the happy change; but here below, one folly shall live upon the tongues and in the memories of men an unreasonable length of time, and not be expiated by the most exemplary behaviour, and an honourable series of virtuous actions; so that in this, to our unspeakable happiness, the thoughts of God are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways.

6. Again; To disclose the faults and indiscretions of others is often very pernicious to society, raises infinite variances amongst men, and tends to destroy the slender remains of love and charity which subsist in the Christian world. By this ill-natured loquaciousness, the peace of families, of neighbourhoods, and of cities is disturbed, and strife and hatred take place where concord and civility might have flourished; for since, through pride and passion and inadvertence, we often throw out rash censures and reflections, many receive and return good offices, who, if they knew what the one has blabbed concerning the other, would become desperate enemies.

No employment then can be more base and uncharitable than to gather up every unguarded

and idle word, and carry it to those who will infallibly resent it, and to force men out of an ignorance, a quiet and happy ignorance of the things which have been said against them.

7. It is farther to be observed upon this subject, that since for the most part we cannot discern the exact nature and degree of other men's faults, we may easily think too hardly and judge too severely of them. Their faults, when we know not the circumstances attending them, are like objects seen by us at a great distance, or at twilight; we see them neither in shape, nor in size or colour, such as they really are.

It must be owned, that there is much open and much secret wickedness in the world, that even the apparent virtues of men are sometimes the offspring of mean or of bad motives, and may rather stand in need of excuse or forgiveness, than deserve commendation.

But as the seeming virtues of men are not always what they seem; so their faults are sometimes less odious than they appear to us, and are attended with favourable circumstances, which diminish the guilt.

Thus we are in a great measure incompetent judges of the actions of others, and there-fore

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fore should decline the office of judging them, when nothing obliges us to it. If we want to be exercising this faculty, we may do it at home, upon ourselves; for we best know the motives of our own actions, and cannot easily impose upon our own conscience.

It is not to be inferred from this, that we should be afraid to call vice, vice, and error, error, and to condemn bad actions. We ought not to justify evil either in ourselves or in others. But we should remember, that in all faults there may be many circumstances either aggravating, or lessening the offence, which are not known to us; and in that case Charity teaches us to hope the best, and to speak and think and judge as candidly as we possibly can; in which if we err, and cause others to err with us, there is no great harm done, and it is much better to be mistaken on that side than on the other. * Thus the Heathen Moralists direct us to behave towards those whom we ought to love and esteem, to make all fair allowances for their imperfections, and to represent their defects in the most favourable

* Vellem in amicitia sic erraremus, et isti
Errori nomen Virtus posuisset honestum.

Horat. Serm.-I. iii. 41.

manner that the thing will admit. What an honest Pagan would have done in this case to a friend, a Christian should do to any and to every man.

And of all the persons whom we are inclined to censure and to condemn, there are none who usually deserve it less than they who differ from us in their opinions, in opinions which tend not directly to debauch the mind, and have no necessary connection with profaneness and immorality. Nothing is more reasonable than to allow them sincerity, and to suppose that they design well, though they judge wrong.

Vice indeed is the parent of error; but there are errors which are of a better family, and come from parents less scandalous, and arise from causes which rather deserve to be ranked amongst weaknesses, than amongst crimes. Such are the prejudices of education, a reverence for parents, friends, and teachers, a superstitious turn of mind, a small capacity, and an infirm judgment. Of all false doctrines we may freely express our dislike, since whosoever loves reason and religion must hate falsehood. But the erring persons, who may possess many good qualities, have not forfeited their right to our favourable opinion. It is no wonder to

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see Ignorance and implicit Faith attended with uncharitable insolence; it can hardly be otherwise; but a man of sense and knowledge, who has been used to think and reason, and examine and correct his own mistakes, cannot hate those who are in error, without hating himself.

8. That we may restrain ourselves from talking of the faults of others, we should also consider that such discourse is produced by bad causes, and proceeds from a corrupted heart; and that all good and wise persons who hear us, will judge of us accordingly. Speech is the child of thought; and a child it is which greatly resembles its parent. When the discourse is censorious and malicious, the mind which conceives it is no better. Pride, anger, self-conceit, self-interest, ill-nature, spitefulness, envy, are often the causes of this talkativeness concerning the defects of our neighbour; at the very best, it must be ascribed to heedlessness and impertinence, qualities which every one would willingly disown.

9. Besides, this is an offence which seldom escapes correction. If human laws cannot chastise it, except in some few cases, the persons who are ridiculed or censured will fully supply

that defect. Though we be cautious, inoffensive and courteous, adversaries will spring up we know not how : they are weeds which will grow, though neither planted nor watered ; not only our vices, but our virtues will produce them. Yet of all men the backbiter hath the most, and those very troublesome and implacable, who want neither inclination, nor power, nor abilities to plague him ; for unkind usage will make a man ingenious even in spite of nature ; it will sharpen the dullest capacity, and render it quick in spying out the defects of an enemy, and skilful in exposing them.

10. Lastly, we should be cautious not to give way to an inclination of talking against others, because if we be once accustomed to it, there is no probability that we shall ever leave it off. They who are censorious, not now and then only, by chance, by sudden passion, by resentment, by a thoughtless indiscretion, but by trade and profession, by long custom and habit, who, like their father, go to and fro in the earth, and walk up and down in it to do mischief, such persons will change for the better, when the *Æthiopian* changes his skin, and the leopard his spots,

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Of all bad habits, those of the tongue are perhaps the hardest to be cured. The reason is this: We deceive ourselves in thinking that words can do little or no hurt, and that the guilt of them is inconsiderably small, and consequently we speak at random what comes uppermost. The wicked actions which we commit are bulky things compared to our discourse, take up more time, force themselves more upon our observation, and sink deeper into our memories; but words, which have wings and fly away, slip from us unregarded, and the remembrance of them, as to us, often perishes with them, especially of those words which we have a habit of uttering. Thus the perpetual talker, the common swearer, the vain boaster, and the old liar often perceive not their several defects. So also the habitual backbiter knows not his own temper and character; and when that is the case, his amendment is almost impossible; and as long as he hath the use of speech, the abuse of it will probably continue.

These are reasons why we should not be inclined to say of others that ill which we know, and can prove to be true,

S E R M O N XIII.

II T I M, iii. 2.

Men shall be lovers of their own selves.

SINCE it is certain that there is an innocent love of ourselves, and yet self-love is here condemned, and has the foremost place in a long catalogue of crimes, it will be proper to state the difference between innocent and vicious self-love.

That there is a love of ourselves which is natural and necessary, and consequently innocent, is a plain truth, and yet a truth which has been opposed and denied. There have been pious and well-meaning persons who, in their refinements on morality and religion, have taught that a man must not only consider the will and the honour of God in all his actions, but that he must forget himself entirely, and have no kind of regard to his own good. Now
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this is not only to require impossibilities of men, but to talk to them in a language which most of them cannot comprehend, that is, in a language quite contrary to the style of the holy Scriptures, which in teaching us our duty condescend always to our capacities, though never to our perverse inclinations.

God has given us a being which is necessarily attended with a love of it, with a desire to preserve and enjoy our life, with an endeavour to shun the things which hurt us, and to provide the things which conduce to our ease and support. This Nature implants in us, and to this it leadeth us.

Our Reason, which judges of good and evil, teaches us to use our skill and industry in getting and securing whatsoever is agreeable and useful to us, under these limitations, that we do no wrong to others, that we transgress no law of God, and that we seek not what upon the whole will do us more harm than good.

This love of ourselves, which is natural to us, and which reason confirms in us, is plainly allowed in the Scriptures; for there we learn, that by divine appointment our duty and our interest are inseparably connected, and that whilst we serve our Maker, we serve ourselves;

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we have there set before us, as motives to obedience, a variety of rewards both temporal and eternal; we have there dissuatives from vice enforced by denunciations of punishments here and hereafter. Such a method of treating us supposes that we love, and that we must love ourselves, else it would be unaccountable. Praise and blame, exhortations and discouragements, promises and threatenings, rewards and corrections, are designed for those who love their own happiness, that is, who love themselves.

God has placed us in a world abounding with all good things suited to our natural appetites and inclinations; he has made an ample provision for our real wants and just desires, so that we might generally pass our days here with tolerable ease and satisfaction, if it were not for our own fault, and for the ill usage which we give and receive. Now God would not have set these things before us in our reach, unless he had intended that we should enjoy them, unless we might seek and possess them. Self-love therefore, as it directs us to provide discreetly at all times for our welfare, is lawful.

God has required of us a disposition to do good to all, he has recommended the social virtues in the strongest terms; yet even in this he makes

makes the love which we have for ourselves the measure and the rule of our love to others. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: and, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.

Hence we learn, that there is a self-love which is natural, innocent, and unavoidable.

But there is an affection for ourselves which is irregular and pernicious, and which we call self-love; for this word is usually taken in a bad sense. By it is meant an esteem and fondness for ourselves arising from evil causes, exceeding its true bounds, hurtful to others, and hurtful to ourselves. The particular kinds of it are many, and shall now be considered distinctly.

1. Self-love is vicious, when it leads us to judge too favourably of our faults.

Sometimes it finds out other * names for them, and, by miscalling them, endeavours to take away their bad qualities. Thus, according to self-love, covetousness is frugality, selfishness is oeconomy, profusion is liberality,

* *Nemo se avarum esse intelligit, nemo cupidum.*—*Dicimus, Non ego ambitiosus sum, sed nemo aliter Romæ potest vivere. Non ego sumtuosus sum, &c.* *Seneca, Epist. l. 50.*

Timidus vocat se cautum, parcum fordidus. Publius Syrus.

ambition

ambition is a generous desire of excelling, censoriousness is impartiality, severity is justice, and the spirit of persecution is religious zeal.

Sometimes it represents our sins as weaknesses, infirmities, the effect of natural constitution, and deserving more pity than blame.

Sometimes it excuses them upon account of the intent, pretending that some good or other is promoted by them, and that the motive and the end sanctify the means, or greatly lessen the faultiness of them.

It leads us to set our good in opposition to our bad qualities, and to persuade ourselves that what is laudable in us far outweighs what is evil.

It teaches us to compare ourselves with others, and thence to draw favourable and flattering conclusions, because we are not so bad as several whom we could name; it shews us the general corruption that is in the world, represents it worse than it is, and then tells us that we must not hope, and need not endeavour to be remarkably and singularly good.

2. Our self-love is irregular, when we think too well of our righteousness, and overvalue our good actions, and are pure in our own eyes.

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This religious conceit and spiritual pride destroys that humility which God requires even of the most virtuous ; it prevents that improvement in goodness which has its foundation in humility. They who trust in themselves that they are righteous, will also usually despise others, and become rash and censorious. They consider not that God prefers the sorrowful acknowledgment even of a great offender, followed by amendment, to the insolence of a vain boaster, who magnifies his incomplete obedience, and thinks himself arrived at perfection.

At the best, we are, as our Lord tells us, unprofitable servants : we have received much from God, and we have made him a small return.

We should state the account fairly, and see what assistance we have had from others ; first from God, who has made us what we are, and caused the light of the Gospel to shine upon us ; then from our parents, friends and teachers, for education, advice, reproof, instruction, and encouragement ; from good examples, both those which are recorded in history, and those which have offered themselves to our view amongst the persons with whom we converse.

We

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We should examine our past and present conduct, not by comparing ourselves with profligate persons, whom it is no credit to surpass, but by judging our actions according to the laws of God; in which inquiry if we proceed impartially, we shall find enough to mortify our pride. He who surveys himself thus, will see many things which stand in need of pardon, and few which deserve approbation. The thoughts of man are often running upon follies and trifles, his affections too much fixed upon transitory objects, his desires extravagant and irregular, his passions disorderly, his hopes and fears, his joy and sorrow raised by small causes, and carried beyond decency and discretion, his heart frequently cold to spiritual things, his resolutions of amendment weak and inconstant, his behaviour to others not uniform, his obedience at the best incomplete, his most commendable actions imperfect, mixed and sullied with little views to something that did not deserve his regard. There is none who can pronounce himself clear of such faults and defects. To think ourselves free from them would be a great fault. A sincere endeavour to amend and improve is

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not more our duty than a due sense and meek acknowledgment of our imperfections.

3. Our self-love is blameable when we over-value our abilities, and entertain too good an opinion of our knowledge and capacity : and this kind of self-love is called self-conceit.

One evil which men reap from it, is to be disliked and despised. There are some faults which the world is disposed to forgive, or not to censure very severely, such for example as intemperance, extravagance, and rash courage ; and there are faults which every one blames, such as ingratitude, covetousness, maliciousness, and self-conceit.

The reason why self-conceit is so much disliked, is plainly this, that it is always attended with a mean opinion of others. There never was a person vain of things which he possessed, or thought that he possessed, in common with multitudes : it is a superiority, real or imaginary, on which this self-love is founded. As therefore the conceited person sets himself above others, and looks down upon them with scorn ; they in revenge will endeavour to abase him who would thus be exalted. On this account worldly wisdom bids us avoid even the appearances

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ances of vanity, and not commend in ourselves what really deserves commendation : and here in religion also joins with worldly wisdom; teaching us to use the same caution, and to let another praise us, and not our own lips.

From self-conceit arise rash undertakings, indiscreet attempts, hasty determinations, stubbornness, insolence, envy, censoriousness, confidence, vanity, the love of flattery, and sometimes irreligion, and a kind of idolatry, by which a man worships his own abilities, and places his whole trust in them.

The unreasonableness of this conceit appears from the imperfections of the human understanding, and the obstacles which lie between us and wisdom. All knowledge is attained with much pains and difficulty : the utmost that we can acquire of it bears no proportion to our ignorance ; it is kept up, as it was at first attained, by labour ; it is gradually lost and forgotten, unless it be frequently reviewed and recollected ; it is suddenly snatched away, and quite blotted out by many bodily distempers ; the mind is soon wearied in the search of it, is misguided by prejudices, is deceived by false appearances, is disturbed by the various alterations which the body undergoes, and

has several diseases of its own which are so many impediments in the way to wisdom.

Hence it is that knowledge is in a great measure hidden from the eyes of men, that the most inquisitive and learned differ in their opinions, that the most careful and considerate vary and change their sentiments, and that the most judicious are the most sensible of their own weakness.

To remember this, to love truth with all our heart, to seek it with all our strength, and to perceive that we can discover only a little of it, is to be as wise as we can be here below. Whosoever entertains higher thoughts than these in favour of himself, has employed his time and pains to no purpose, has not only much to learn, but much to unlearn, and is farther from wisdom than he was in his childhood.

To be conceited through an opinion of a superiority of judgment, sagacity and experience, is foolish, because in all probability it is groundless. For why should we fancy ourselves so much above others? There are in every age a few of uncommon abilities and great knowledge; and there are some as remarkably deficient. These two sorts excepted,
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the rest of the world are more upon the level than some vain heads are willing to think. The powers of the mind are not extremely different in different persons ; sense and understanding, and the means of improving them, are common blessings ; sincerity and industry are not qualities peculiar to any of us. Others therefore may seek the truth as successfully, and reason as judiciously, and act as discreetly as we.

Besides ; they who are wise and prudent, are not always so, but with their good sense and acute discernment have a mixture of frailty and imperfection sufficient to keep them modest and humble. Every one has his dark intervals : there is nothing so silly that some wise man has not said, and nothing so weak that some prudent man has not done.

4. Our self-love is irregular when we are proud and vain of things inferior in nature to those before-mentioned, when we value ourselves upon the station and circumstances in which not our own deserts, but chance, or favour, or birth hath placed us, upon mere shew and outside, upon these and the like advantages in which we surpass others.

This conceit is unreasonable and foolish; for these are either things which the possessors can hardly call their own, as having done little or nothing to acquire them, or they are of small value, or they are liable to be irrecoverably lost by many unforeseen accidents. They often bring more hurt than good with them, expose men to dangers and temptations, hinder them from improving their understanding, have a bad effect upon their minds, and make them fools if they do not find them such; and whosoever uses them rightly, yet possesses them in common with some of the weakest, the most contemptible, the most profligate and vilest persons.

5. Lastly, our self-love is vicious when we make our worldly interest, convenience, humour, ease or pleasure, the great end of our actions. This is selfishness, a very disengenuous and sordid kind of self-love. It is a passion that leads a man to any baseness which is joined to lucre, and to any method of growing rich which may be practised with impunity. It occupies the mind with low and mean views, and weakens or destroys the desire of reputation, the fear of contempt, and the compassionate, and friendly, and charitable, and generous dispo-

dispositions. If it meets with good abilities it disgraces and spoils them, and turns a man's wisdom into craft, and his sagacity into tricks.

A selfish person thinks and acts as if the world and every thing that is in it were made for him, for his sole use and pleasure, as if his concerns must be preferred to the interest of all others. But it is unreasonable that one man should expect to be considered as if he were more than one man, that he should want to be set above his equals or his betters. A more absurd and ridiculous creature can hardly be conceived than a person who desires every thing and deserves nothing.

Selfishness is unreasonable, as it is contrary even to our present advantage.

The end which it pursues, is worldly happiness; but in reality it tends more to lessen than to promote it; for it knows not the pleasure of doing good offices, it enjoys not the esteem of the virtuous part of mankind, it is accompanied with envy and with insatiable desires, and it is often the cause of disappointments; for men take a delight in opposing, crossing, and overreaching such persons, and when they are ill-used, they are seldom pitied; for he who is in

love with himself alone, is sure to love himself without a rival.

Lastly, selfishness is unreasonable, because the objects which it pursues are not worthy to be sought so earnestly and loved so immoderately.

Man's life consisteth not in that much envied and unprofitable thing called abundance. Our Saviour hath said so; and most men have said or thought so, who have had the trial of it. Abundance cannot give understanding to the simple, nor health to the infirm: it cannot prolong life; it is very well if it doth not shorten it: it cannot secure from slander and detraction, or calm the disquiet of a guilty conscience, or become a certain or a lasting possession.

Hence it is manifest that man, who is endued with reason and liberty, and can employ them to so good purposes, for whom Christ died, to whom heaven is proposed as a reward of well-doing, who in this world finds nothing equal to his desires, acts in a foolish and perverse manner, when he sacrifices better things to secure his temporal interests, to thrust himself into some station for which he is unfit, to obtain more wealth than he wants or knows how to employ, more power than he can discreetly use, or more outward respect from persons who

who perhaps in their hearts hate or despise him.

Hence we may also see the folly of that repining uneasiness which selfishness raises in us when we are neglected by the world, and behold others, though our inferiors, thrive and succeed better than we. If this life were our only portion, this earth our first and last habitation, we might have some pretence to grieve that bread should not be to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill. But if there be a better world to come, in which we may secure to ourselves an everlasting habitation, these small and transitory inconveniences should not much offend and disturb us; especially since by possessing little in this place of sojourning, we shall find a safer and easier passage to our home, and our treasure not being here, neither will our heart be here in all probability.

Thus much distinctly concerning the several kinds of irregular self-love; to which I shall now add a few general remarks concerning this fault.

St. Paul says in the chapter whence the text is taken, In the last days men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blas-

blasphemers, and guilty of many other crimes, which he there mentions.

St. Paul seems not to have placed self-love first in this catalogue of vices undesignedly and by chance, but because it is the root of much evil, and the parent of many sins.

Sins against God frequently proceed from an undue love of ourselves. We prefer our pleasure and our interest, as we call it, to his favour. Thence arises disobedience to his laws when they cross our inclinations, when they require any thing disagreeable, when the observance of them exposes us to any inconvenience. We prefer our will to his, and therefore when things happen not to us just as we desire, thence arise impatience and discontent, and dishonourable thoughts of divine providence. We have too high an opinion of ourselves; thence we ascribe all the good which we enjoy to our own labours and merit.

Sins against our neighbour proceed as often from the same cause. From an irregular self-love we grow covetous, rapacious, proud, insolent, envious, malicious, ungrateful and uncharitable.

Such are the bad effects which self-love produces. It is true, indeed, and it ought to be
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particularly observed, that all who are lovers of themselves have not always every bad quality which we have reckoned up. Self-love works differently, and causes greater or lesser, more or fewer disorders in the mind, as it is counter-balanced by more or fewer good dispositions; but some or other of the faults before-mentioned always arise from it.

Thus it appears that self-love is a dangerous corruption, which may be also proved by this observation, that Christ absolutely required of all who would join themselves to him a virtue directly contrary to it, namely, self-denial. Whosoever will come after me, says he, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. This is a commandment which he who loves himself in an undue manner cannot possibly obey. No such person could follow him, at a time when all, even life itself, was to be laid down for his sake. No such person ever died a martyr, except to his own follies and vices; and even in times when no persecution or disgrace attends the profession of Christianity, yet to such an one the Gospel is disagreeable; he is as little disposed to obey some of its precepts, as he would be to undergo stripes and imprisonment, and loss of life.

Lastly;

Lastly ; self-love is dangerous, because it is of a deceitful nature ; it finds an easy admittance into our hearts, and is usually attended with much blindness and ignorance.

But the ignorance is voluntary, and the means to remove it are in our hands. Our Saviour hath given us this precept concerning our behaviour towards others : Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. In this rule we may also find how we ought to love ourselves : for as we should love our neighbour as ourselves, so we ought to love ourselves as our neighbour ; that is, we ought to have such a love for ourselves, as we know that we ought to have for others, and what we reckon an honest and upright conduct towards one whom we esteem, and whose prosperity we heartily desire, will inform us how we must deal with ourselves.

Now it is easy to know what sort of behaviour that is. If our affection be virtuous and prudent, we value our friend according to his deserts, and pay him a due regard, honouring whatsoever is commendable and amiable in him, but neither ascribing to him accomplishments which he has not, nor placing him above his superiors or his equals, nor giving him praises which may insensibly lead him into pride and insolence.

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insolence. We are not blind to his faults, we set them before him, and tell him disagreeable truths when it is necessary that he should hear them. We never encourage or help him to pursue things hurtful to himself or to others ; we industriously promote his welfare by all innocent methods ; more especially we have in view the welfare of his mind, and his improvement in those good qualities upon which depend the favour of God and eternal life.

Thus a good man would act towards his friend ; and thus every one should deal with himself, and approve nothing there which he would not approve in another person.

S E R M O N

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S E R M O N XIV.

ECCLES. vii. 14.

*In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of
adversity consider.*

THE life of man is made up of prosperity and adversity, of pleasure and pain, which succeed one another here below in an eternal rotation, like day and night, summer and winter. And as the confines of light and darkness, and of the seasons of the year are scarcely distinguishable, and the one slides into the other insensibly, so it is with pleasure and pain; for excess of pleasure is a degree of pain, and a relaxation of pain is a degree of pleasure.

Thus far all men are pretty much alike, as they partake of the same nature, and receive the same impressions from things external; but they differ widely as to the manner and measure in which they are affected by these
vicissi-

vicissitudes. The wise man is the same man in all situations, and either his condition complies with his desires, or his desires comply with his condition, whilst others are prepared for nothing, and can act decently in neither state ; the least alteration discomposes them, which is as sure a proof of an inward disorder, and of an infirm mind, as it is a sign of a weakly constitution to be sick whenever the weather changes, and to be able to bear neither heat or cold.

“ * It was a lofty saying, that the advantages of prosperity are to be wished ; but the advantages of adversity are to be admired. The principal virtue of prosperity is temperance ; the principal virtue of adversity is fortitude, which in morality is allowed to be the more heroical virtue. Prosperity best discovers vice, adversity best discovers virtue, which is like those perfumes that are most fragrant when burnt or bruised. Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament ; Adversity is the blessing of the New.”

Prosperity and adversity are words which every one understands, or thinks that he understands ; but then it is to be observed that

* Bacon.

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S E R M O N XIV. 273

the effect which accidents have upon us is so different in different persons; that what one counts adversity, another may account prosperity, or something between both. There are however things which are of so fixed a nature that they may be pronounced good or evil, prosperous or adverse. Thus pleasure and pain, cheerfulness and sadness, health and sickness, strength and infirmity, plenty and indigence, gain and loss, success and disappointment, peace and enmity, reputation and censure, and the condition of friends and familiars, constitute prosperity and adversity.

But the mind of man, though it cannot alter outward circumstances and accidents, and in this respect is entirely passive, hath such an agency upon itself, that it can often bring forth its own satisfaction or uneasiness; and so make its condition better or worse. By prudence and goodness it can increase the prosperity and lessen the adversity which befalls it. In this, as in some other qualities, it shews its divine original, it bears some resemblance to its Author, and hath a kind of *creative* power, a power to begin action, and to raise motives, and to ap-

* Nihil magis politicum, quam animi rotas reddere cum Fortuna: rotis concentricas et simul volubiles. *Bacon.*

ply both of them to the production of happiness. But then by a bad conduct, and misapplication of these powers, it can do the reverse and bring evil and sorrow upon itself. All this seems to be supposed by Solomon, when he advises ; In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider.

Prosperity and Adversity usually walk hand in hand : The divine Providence hath joined them, and I shall not put them asunder, but offer some remarks upon them both.

I begin with the latter part of the sentence ; In the day of adversity consider.

Adversity then is a time for consideration ; and so is prosperity too. If Solomon had said, In the day of prosperity consider, the admonition had not been improper ; but adversity more particularly calls for consideration. Prosperity will teach it to a wise man ; but adversity should teach it even to a fool ; and in that melancholy season many things offer themselves to our meditation.

In the day of adversity we should consider whether we can free ourselves from it. For it happens sometimes that whilst we complain, we have the remedy in our own hands, if we had the heart and the sense to make use of it ;

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and then we cannot expect that men or that God should assist us, if we are wanting to ourselves. If it be some evil that civility, and compliance in things lawful, and industry, and discretion, and any innocent occupation can remove, we must exert ourselves, and use our best endeavours.

But most commonly adversity is of that nature, that it is not in our power to remove it; and then we should consider how to lessen it, or how to bear it in the best manner we can.

We should consider that adversity, as well as prosperity, is permitted or appointed by divine Providence. God hath so ordered the course of things, that there should be a mixture and a rotation of both in this world, and therefore we ought to acquiesce in it, and to be contented that God's will be done. This may be the consideration which Solomon intended more particularly to recommend. In the day of prosperity, says he, be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other. The meaning may be; In the day of adversity consider this, namely, that God hath appointed this vicissitude, this succession of good and evil. If then this be his will, and part of the scheme of Providence,

dence, nothing is left for us but the honour of submitting. And surely it is better to be led than to be dragged. Submission, patience, and resignation are of a calm and quiet nature, and afford some relief, composure, and peace of mind; but repining and reluctance only irritate the pain, and add one evil to another.

To tell an afflicted person that it must be so, may be thought a rough and an overbearing argument, rather fit to silence than to satisfy a man. Therefore we should add this consideration, not only that adversity is proper because God permits it, but that God permits it because it is proper.

Perhaps we have brought the adversity upon ourselves, by our own imprudence and misconduct. If so, it is just that God should suffer things to take their course, and not interpose to relieve us, and we ought to submit to it, as to a state which we deserve. Nature indeed will dispose us in such a case to discontent and to remorse; but Religion will teach us to make a good use of the calamity.

God may suffer us to fall into adversity by way of correction for our sins. If so, sorrowful we should be for the cause, and sorrowful we may be for the effect; but we have many motives

motives to patience, resignation, and gratitude. It is much better that we should receive our punishment here than hereafter; and if it produce any amendment in us, it serves to the best of purposes, and ends in peace and joy and happiness.

God may visit us with adversity, by way of trial, and for our greater improvement, that we may correct some frailties and faults into which prosperity hath led us, or of which it could never cure us, that we may look upon the transitory vanities of the present world with more coldness and indifference, and set our affections on things above, that we may be humble and modest, and know ourselves, that we may learn affability, humanity, and compassion for those who suffer, and likewise that we may have a truer taste for prosperity when it comes, and enjoy it with wisdom and moderation. Upon all these accounts adversity is suitable to us, and tends to our profit.

The same Providence, which suffers particular persons to be thus tried and exercised, hath subjected nations to the like general law of mutability, and permits them to fall under public calamities.

If we consider for what kind and profitable ends these disorders and troubles can be intended, we find that it is to correct national errors and vices, and to substitute and introduce the contrary good qualities, and to wean mankind from an intemperate love of the world, and to direct their thoughts to heaven, the true country of every Christian, and the only place which he ought to consider as his home.

It is for the use of society in general, and of each member of it, that God permits the misconduct, the oppression, and the calamities which at different times infest the kingdoms of the earth, and which make up so great a part of ancient and of modern history, to teach us by these harsh instructors many important lessons, to shew us the vanity and instability of things below, and to give us a wise and religious coldness towards all that mortal men can bestow, or can take away.

Therefore he suffers the disorders of the elements, or intemperate seasons, or contagious distempers, or unjust wars, or the profligate behaviour of Counsellors and Statesmen, or civil discord, and the folly and fury of contending parties, to involve nations from time to time in confusion and misery; and then again

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he restores to them the blessings of public tranquillity and prosperity, and of a just and mild administration.

One of the ends of adversity is, to make us better disposed and qualified to receive the favours of God, when they come, with prudence and gratitude, and, as Solomon directs us in the other part of the text, to rejoice in the day of prosperity.

His words may be supposed to contain either a permission or an exhortation to rejoice. The lowest sense then which we can put upon them is this; In the day of prosperity thou mayest rejoice, if thou wilt: there is no harm in it. And in this sense they confute the notion of those who pretend that religion must be all gloominess and sadness of heart, and that cheerfulness is the Mark of the Beast, and a certain sign of a profane and reprobate spirit.

But it is better to take them as an exhortation to rejoice; for Solomon often adviseth men to receive with a cheerful heart the good things which God bestows upon them; and Moses in the book of Deuteronomy recommends the same thankful temper to the people of Israel.

That it is right and fit to rejoice in prosperity, is evident from many reasons. Prosperity

riches is the gift of God, and his gifts cannot be bad; thanksgiving is a duty, but it is impossible to be thankful for that in which we can take no delight; gratitude is a virtue, but he can never be grateful to God or to man, who thinks that what he receives is scarcely worthy of acceptance, or that it is owing purely to his own skill and industry.

That we may rightly apprehend this precept, and be enabled to comply with it, we must observe the following rules.

1. We ought to be in such a temper, as to be easily contented, and to account our state prosperous whenever it is tolerable.

It is the disposition of the mind upon which happiness in a great measure depends. If our cravings be insatiable, and our passions impetuous, prosperity was not made for us, nor we for prosperity; we shall always find or create causes of uneasiness and discontent; but if we contract our desires into a moderate compass, and suffer not smaller inconveniences to put us in disorder, we shall in all probability often find ourselves in a good situation, and possessors of as many temporal blessings as we can reasonably expect.

Thus

Thus the exhortation to rejoice in prosperity carries along with it an indirect exhortation to contentment and moderate hopes and desires, without which wise and virtuous dispositions it will not be in our power to enjoy the favours of providence. He who hath all the necessaries of life, and wants more wealth, authority, respect, submission and attendance, more diversions, pleasures, and amusements, who cannot behold others placed in higher stations, either deservedly or undeservedly, without envy and disquiet, puts himself at the remotest distance from satisfaction and composure of mind. Where there are so many hopes to be answered, and fears to be assuaged, and desires to be gratified, and schemes to be accomplished, there must be frequent disappointments, and an inward disorder besides, which outward circumstances, how favourable and how fortunate soever, cannot remove.

2. We ought to remember that prosperity is a dangerous thing, that it is a state which often perverts the judgment, and spoils the understanding, and corrupts the heart, that it is never sincere and unmixed, that it is also of a precarious nature, and may leave us in an instant. These considerations, it may be imagined,

gined, are the very bane and destruction of all satisfaction and delight, and tend to make us unhappy even in prosperity. But this is a mistake; they will only cause our joy to be discreet and moderate, which is the true method to make it lasting. By being sober and sedate, it will be more easily preserved, and the less liable to pass away, and to be turned into sadness. Nothing that is violent is durable. There is indeed little danger that any wise and considerate person should rejoice overmuch; for the same Providence which gives many comforts to alleviate our griefs, permits many inconveniences and cross accidents to allay our joy, and to keep it in due bounds. The truest joy is an even cheerfulness, pleased with the present, and not solicitous about the future. An exultation which rises higher than this proceeds usually from thoughtless indiscretion, from a total want of judgment, from a weakness of temper liable to be easily elevated, and as easily depressed. Joy is a serious thing, and noisy tumultuous mirth is quite different from it.

3. We ought to consider what Solomon, who exhorts us to rejoice in prosperity, hath represented as the most important point: Let us
hear,

hear, says he, the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep his commandments; for this concerns us all. This is what every man may do, and this is what every man must do, and whosoever neglects it cannot be happy. To such an one there can be no peace. He who is wicked, often hurts his own body, and always hurts his own soul; he spoils his own temper, lets loose his own vicious affections upon himself, disoblige his friends, increases his enemies, loses the best of friends, and provokes the most formidable of all adversaries, even the God who made him, and is obnoxious to many and just fears both for the present and for the future. And how can he rejoice even in prosperity? He may rejoice, in the vulgar and the wrong sense of the word; his mirth and his pleasures may be rude and boisterous, and soon cease, and leave a bitterness behind them, or terminate in mischief to himself and to others. This is not happiness; it is at the best, a momentary forgetting of one's own misery. Solomon speaks of this sort of joy with great judgment, and like a wise observer; Even in laughter, says he, the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness. And again; I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doth it?

4. If we would rejoice in prosperity, we must acquire and we must preserve, cherish and improve a love towards our neighbour, an universally benevolent and charitable disposition, by which we shall be enabled to take delight not only in our own prosperity, but in that of others; and this will give us several occasions of satisfaction, which selfish persons never regard or entertain. It is nothing to them what becomes of the rest of the world, if things go well at home, and within the sordid compass of their own little sphere. But they who are of a more humane and generous temper, and sincerely wish the welfare of others, partake in some measure of it, and are inclined to rejoice with those who rejoice. In this temper is founded the love of our country, an affection unknown to narrow minds, which measure all public good and evil by the share which they receive of the one or the other, and account favourable events to be nothing, unless they be attended with some private and personal advantage. But a benevolent spirit is, to say the truth, a very manly virtue, which requires many previous good qualities, and which therefore few possess even in a tolerable degree. Thence it is that the calamities, the losses and miseries which befall other persons, affect

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affect us very little, especially if we are not intimately acquainted with them; we hear the sad story, and we forget it as a tale that is told: but when we are the sufferers ourselves, the blow is felt, and the heart bleeds.

If the adversity of others gives us little concern, their prosperity gives us still less satisfaction; and two reflections are apt to rise in our minds, first, that the fortunate persons hardly deserve such happiness, and secondly that we deserve it much better than they. But if we give way to considerations of this perverse kind, and to any degree of dissatisfaction upon these accounts, we lay a sure foundation for perpetual discontent, since an unequal distribution of good things in the present state must needs prevail, and the favour of this world will ever be capriciously, injudiciously, absurdly, and most unjustly bestowed, as we may see every day; and he who will fret at such things hath nothing to do but to fret on, till death puts an end to his foolish sorrows.

And now, let us observe that this subject which we have been discussing is considered in a very different manner in the Old Testament, and in the New. Solomon, as a wise man, recommends it to his nation to be cheerful in prof-

prosperity, and considerate in adversity. Farther than this the wisdom and religion of his times could not conduct a man. But St. Paul, when he treats the subject, exhorts Christians to rejoice evermore, and consequently in adversity as well as in prosperity; our Saviour commands his disciples to rejoice and to be exceeding glad when they should be ill used for his sake; and it is said of the first believers, that they were sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, and that they had in all circumstances an inward serenity, of which nothing could deprive them. This joy in adversity is an advantage peculiar to the Christian religion, and an effect which the Jewish dispensation, though of divine original, was not able to produce; and as strange as it may and as it must seem to worldly minds, and rather fanatical and inconceivable than in any degree probable and reasonable, it is built upon a sure foundation, and there are many causes and motives sufficient to excite and to preserve it.

For first, Christianity represents God as a God of love and goodness, and removes all gloomy and superstitious apprehensions of him. It exhorts us to serve and imitate him, and then it assures us that we have every thing to hope, and nothing to fear from him, that we may address

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ourselves to him at all times, and rely upon his succour in all exigencies.

Secondly, it represents him indeed as a God of perfect purity, holiness, and justice, which must raise in mortal minds a dread proportionable to their imperfections and offences, that is, to those imperfections which are indulged, and to those offences which are wilful; but by the gracious doctrine of forgiveness to the penitent, it allays all tormenting terrors, and excludes despondence and despair.

Thirdly, it gives us rules of behaviour, which, if carefully observed, have a natural and necessary tendency to secure us from many sorrows, and to enliven our minds, and to set before us happy prospects, and pleasing expectations.

Fourthly, it promises a divine assistance under pressures and dangers, and losses and afflictions, which shall raise the mind above itself, and above all outward and earthly things. The spirit of a man, says Solomon, will sustain his infirmity: If he hath courage and constancy, the evils which befall him lose much of their force and violence, and he is able to struggle with them, and to come off with credit. Even human strength and the natural powers

powers which God confers upon us can support a man in distress, when he is tolerably innocent, and his conduct towards God and towards men hath not been flagitious. There is a wonderful satisfaction and complacency in a rational and modest self-approbation, and the best friend in this world is one's own conscience. Thus far the Spirit of a man can stand by him and assist him : but the spirit of God is greater, and can animate a Christian, so as to make him more than a conqueror ; of which Ecclesiastical history affords many illustrious examples in those times when Christianity was discountenanced and oppressed, and all sorts of human terrors set themselves in array against it.

Lastly, it promises an eternal recompense of well-doing, which whosoever believes and expects must be happy, or at least contented in all times and states : and without question, to a want of a lively faith, and of a reasonable hope in this great point, and to a certain degree, more or less, of doubt and diffidence, is to be principally ascribed the want of resignation and of composure.

When to these Christian considerations are also added reflections on the days of our abode here below, which are few, and on the world which

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which passeth away, a sedateness and evenness of temper will ensue, which, as it is patient and resigned under changes for the worse, so it is pleased with prosperity, accepts it as a divine blessing, and uses it soberly and discreetly.

Human life is of so short a duration, that if we had a due sense of it, and if each of us had nothing to care for besides ourselves, even prosperity, desirable as it is, would only be a petty trifle, and this thought would so naturally arise, What is it to me, who perhaps shall not possess it three days, and who may go hence before another sun rises? Therefore what makes prosperity valuable is, that it enables us to be serviceable to others, to our friends, to our family, to our country, and to mankind, and to make a sober and a commendable use of it, whilst we have it; and then the good effects of it will continue, when it is passed away, and we have run our appointed course.

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S E R M O N XV.

TITUS ii. 11, 12.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

THE Gospel of Jesus Christ, saith St. Paul, is revealed to us, and the design of it is, to teach and enable us to behave ourselves here in such a manner that we may obtain eternal life. Thus the words of the text contain in them a compendious representation of the whole duty of man, namely, faith and good works.

What relates to faith is rather intimated than expressed, but it is very plainly intimated, for since this perfect rule of life is discovered by the Gospel, doubtless we must receive the Gospel, and assent to it, and this is faith.

As to practice, we must live soberly; righteously, and godly. Sobriety contains our duty to ourselves, righteousness our duty to our neighbour, and godliness our duty to God; and these duties are closely connected, and often coincide with one another and with Christian faith.

I shall at present consider that part of our duty which relates more directly to God, and is called godliness, though the word godliness or piety often stands for all religion in general.

In the first place, then, Christianity commands us to believe, that there is one God, the Creator and Father of all. This is the foundation of religion; faith in God is the ground and support of all goodness, and may itself in some sense be accounted a virtue, since it ariseth from sober consideration, from a regard to truth and goodness, and must be kept alive by the same means; and since a vicious and debauched mind is strongly disposed to doubt whether there be an invisible creator and Lord of all, and to wish that there were none.

A belief in God is faith, and not sight, because the object of it is He who is not to be perceived

by

by our senses, or comprehended by our imagination ; but it is a faith founded upon reason, and supported by convincing arguments, of which the most plain and familiar are the frame and order and disposition of the visible world, the general consent of mankind, and the general usefulness of the doctrine itself, which is adapted to do us good, and which cannot possibly do us any harm.

Moreover, the Christian religion teacheth us to entertain just and honourable notions of God's perfections, both those which we commonly call natural perfections, such as eternity and infinite power ; and those which we call moral perfections, as holiness, justice, goodness, and mercy. The Scriptures frequently remind us of both, as being proper to excite in us a fear and a love of God.

They cannot be said to entertain right conceptions of the Deity, who extol his power, and his absolute and uncontrolable dominion over his creatures ; but represent him at the same time as ruling in a way, which in any other being we should call arbitrary and cruel. This can never be reconciled with the common notions of holiness, justice, and goodness ; nor with the Scriptures, which represent God as

love itself, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works. It was long ago observed, that there never was any opinion, how absurd soever, which was not maintained by some or other of the ancient Philosophers; but yet there are not to be found even amongst them any such hateful sentiments concerning God's transactions with men. To suppose that God hath doomed his creatures to eternal misery, for being in a state of sin which they cannot avoid, and out of which he will not help them, this, I say, is such a manifest contradiction to the divine perfections, that no men could possibly have entertained it, if they had not misunderstood some texts of Scripture, and taken it for a doctrine of revealed Religion.

They who entertain just thoughts of God, and declare them upon all proper occasions, may be said to hallow or sanctify his name, which that all persons may do, we are taught by our Saviour to wish in our daily prayers. In this the Gentiles failed greatly, who ascribed to their deities human vices, and honoured them with impure and cruel rites. The Jews were not intirely free from fault in this respect, being much inclined to represent God as caring only for their nation,
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and regardless of the Gentiles; and indeed all Christians have not sufficiently avoided the same errors.

These things are of the more importance, because they who judge amiss concerning the perfections and the government of God, are much inclined to imitate all the defects which they ascribe to him.

It is a great violation of our duty to God, to interpose his holy name in things of no consequence, or, which is far worse, in confirmation of things which are false. Therefore our Lord hath not only forbidden perjury, but oaths upon trivial occasions; even those oaths, in which care was taken to avoid mentioning the name of God. Whosoever understands how sacred the divine Majesty is, and how many and how great benefits we have received, and have room to hope and expect from our Creator, cannot think of him without the deepest reverence, and will never name him in a rash and ludicrous manner, nor call upon him to be witnesses to a falsehood. This wicked behaviour was frequent amongst both Jews and Gentiles, and is no less frequent amongst persons who call themselves Christians; but it hath been detested

and condemned by all serious and wise men in all times and places.

With this reverence towards God is joined a love to him. If we have any sense of his goodness and favour towards us his unworthy creatures, we cannot refuse him our love. This love consists, first, in a grateful sense of his benefits; secondly, in a desire of pleasing him, which shall be strong and active enough to overcome all contrary desires, so that our heart shall not be divided between God and any object which God condemns. This duty Moses enjoined, and our Saviour enforced, and represented as the first and great commandment.

Other love towards God than this, the Scriptures know not: they never recommend those warm transports and that bold familiarity which some zealots affect; nor that refined and mysterious devotion which another sort of visionaries require, who say that we must love God for himself alone, and without any regard to the benefits we receive from him; for, first, the love of God is reason and not passion, reverence and not presumption; secondly, it is gratitude, and we love him because he first loved us.

The love of God cannot lie concealed in the breast, but will shine forth, and shew itself by
good

good works, particularly by a love of mankind, as the Scriptures assure us. Without this behaviour, in vain do we profess to love God, who requires of us real proofs, and not idle words.

There is a worship which is due to God alone. Worship, or adoration, when it means a religious duty paid to God, is of two kinds. There is a worship of the body, and there is a worship of the mind. By the worship of the body, which hath been various in various times and places, is to be understood an humble posture, by which persons intend to acknowledge the supreme dominion of him to whom this reverence is paid. By the worship or adoration of the mind, is meant that submissive disposition, by which we own and profess, that He whom we adore is endued with all perfections, and that we depend wholly upon him, and from him expect all our happiness. Therefore God, as he is the Creator, the Lord, the Protector, and the Father of all, ordered himself alone to be adored in this manner, both in body and spirit; which our Saviour hath also confirmed, when he said to Satan, It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve; him only, in opposition to false Gods; for, as St. Paul says, though

though there be that are called Gods, whether in heaven or in earth, as there be gods many and lords many, yet to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we to him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. And our Saviour saith, that the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son, that all men may honour the Son, as they honour the Father.

The Gentiles notoriously transgressed this commandment, worshipping any thing, and every thing; as if it were lawful for mortal men to confer divine honours upon this or that object, as flattery or fancy should direct; than which nothing more absurd could easily be imagined, nor more injurious to the majesty of God.

The Law and the Gospel teach us, that in God alone our confidence should be placed, because he alone can and will do all things for us, and will never deceive our reasonable hopes, whilst in created beings there is neither that all-commanding power, nor that invariable will of doing good, nor that never-failing constancy in performing promises. So that reliance or trust is no inconsiderable part of our duty

duty towards God, It relates in some degree to the things of this life, which God promiseth to his servants, so far as he judgeth fit, and conducing to their true interest. But it principally hath in view the endless happiness of the next world, which we should account to be our chief good.

And because our Lord hath given us clearer promises of life eternal than had been revealed before, and confirmed them by many proofs, and by his own glorious resurrection and ascension, the reliance which we place in God should be proportionably stronger and steadier. This reliance is a part of Christian faith, and is connected with obedience; and hence we may see that faith is deservedly extolled by the sacred Writers, since it contains in itself, or in its genuine effects, the whole duty of man.

Since in many things we all offend, since we ought to deplore our omissions and commissions, and to wish that we may perform a better service for the future; since we are continually contending with temptations, by which if we be finally overcome, we have no longer a claim to the promises of the Gospel, God hath commanded us to address ourselves to him for the pardon and the succour of which we stand in
6 need.

need. He wanteth not our prayers, to be informed of our weakneses and necessities, or to be intreated and importuned as a difficult master, who will sell his favours upon no other terms. Nothing moved him to create us, but his own nature overflowing with beneficence. He hath granted us many blessings, which we had no notion of requesting; as redemption by Christ, the knowledge of the Gospel, and all the benefits which arise from these, and are connected with them. He hath imposed upon us the duty of prayer purely for our own sakes, and to make us better and happier. For when we pray to him, we call to mind our past follies and offences, and at the same time his infinite goodness, which forgives them upon our repentance, and we become sensible that we depend upon him in all respects, whence naturally arise gratitude towards so kind a benefactor, and earnest desires to obey and please him. Hence also will this consideration present itself to us, that if the compassionate and placable nature of God be so amiable, and in our sight the brightest and the fairest of all the divine perfections, we ought to imitate it in our behaviour towards others, and be merciful even as he is merciful, and, like him, forgive those who trespass against us.

Three

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Three things are requisite to make our prayers acceptable to God ;

First, We must ask of God the things which are really and invariably good ; such as the knowledge of moral and religious truth, the remission of sins, the divine assistance, and eternal life, all which are intimately united, and neither can or ought to be separated. For other good things we are permitted to ask ; but this exception is always to be made or understood, that God would supply our wants, and satisfy our natural and innocent desires, in such a measure and manner as shall seem best to him, who knoweth better than we, what is expedient for us.

Secondly, We must make our requests to God with acquiescence and humility. We must not prescribe to him what he should grant us ; nor ever repine and murmur, if temporal blessings be withholden from us.

Thirdly, We must be fully sensible that we can have no certain access to him, no security of his favour, unless we endeavour to conform our behaviour to his precepts ; for it is not reasonable that he should comply with the requests of those who refuse to comply with his holy will. Thus much our Saviour intimates,
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when he directs us to ask in his name. To ask in the name of Christ, is the same thing as to profess before God that we are indeed the disciples and the servants of his Son, and upon that account to beg and to hope that he will extend his goodness towards us. But no person can have any pretence to make use of the name of Christ, who pays no regard to the conditions which Christ requires of his followers.

And because the love of our neighbour is not less our duty than the love of God, therefore we are taught to extend our prayers beyond our own private necessities; and whatsoever blessings we would gladly receive ourselves, we should also wish for all mankind.

Vehemence and earnestness is commendable in our prayers; but it is then only commendable when we ask for life eternal, and for the means conducing to it. A strong desire and a warm importunity to be delivered from temporal calamities, or to be enriched with temporal blessings, is a temper to which Religion hath made no favourable promises. St. Paul earnestly besought the Lord that he might be delivered from the Angel of Satan who buffeted him. But this request was not granted, because it was more to his true advantage to labour.

hour under that inconvenience, whatsoever it was, than to be freed from it. And he, as a wife and good man, acquiesced in the divine will.

Although the Jews were furnished both with precepts and with examples of prayer in the books of Moses and of the Prophets, yet was this duty neither completely taught, nor perfectly understood, because the express and literal promises in the Law were temporal; so that they seldom seem to have asked for any thing higher, but only, as to things spiritual, to have requested in general for the favour of God. And yet the good men, who lived under that dispensation, were certainly not without hopes of a better state beyond the grave, and trusted in God that he would in some manner provide for them hereafter, according to his wisdom and goodness. We do not find in the Books of the Old Testament every thing that is requisite to set the nature of prayer in a true light and to the best advantage; and we must make some suitable abatements and allowances on account of the more imperfect knowledge of those times. However, we find in those sacred Writings many excellent examples of piety, of humility, of religious

ligious trust and confidence in God. The wiser Pagans have also made some good observations concerning prayer; and particularly they have remarked, that men ought not rashly to ask of the Deity whatsoever their childish and irregular and ignorant desires lead them to wish. They have recommended this short form of prayer, which certainly is modest and judicious; Grant us, O Lord, the things which are good for us, whether we ask, or ask not, for them; and the things which would be hurtful, withhold from us, though we should ask for them. But, besides that the wiser Pagans had some false notions concerning the Deity, the common sort observed no rules of decency and prudence in their prayers. So that Christianity in this, as in many other respects, greatly surpassed the religion of the wisest Pagans and Jews.

With our prayers to God are to be joined praises and thanksgivings to him for his glorious works, and for all the great and lasting benefits which with a liberal hand he pours down upon men. The Psalms of David, and indeed all the books of the holy Scriptures, are full of exhortations to celebrate the power and wisdom and clemency of God. The thing is of itself
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most reasonable, and whilst we perform it sincerely and heartily, we daily find the good effects of it. For, besides the perpetual exercise of gratitude, the oftener we consider in our minds and distinctly examine the benefits and the works of God, the more easily we are induced to obey him, and the more effectually deterred from a vicious life. And this is one great reason why God requires from us these acts of piety towards him. No benefit and profit can accrue to him from our praises and thanks; nor would he be the less happy, though we passed over all his favours in stupid silence. Therefore it is for our own sakes that God demands this easy tribute from us. He is indeed said in Scripture to have made and done all for his own glory and praise; but the profit and the benefit of honouring him redound upon us. True it is that God is pleased with our piety, and our dutiful returns, because they are suitable both to his nature and to our own. He hath made all things for his own honour; this was one end: but another end was, that he might exercise his unspeakable goodness towards all objects capable of receiving it.

The writers of the Gospels teach us to obey the divine precepts, not as slaves who fear a

passionate, unreasonable, and rigid master, but as children who cheerfully comply with the directions and advice of a kind parent, which they know to be intended for their good.

But though the Gospel in this respect surpasseth the Jewish dispensation, and treats us as sons, and brings us into a state of liberty, we must not imagine that the service which it demands is something slight and superficial, and requiring no pains and application; for it orders us to put off inordinate desires and evil affections, and, if it should ever prove necessary, to lay down and lose all, rather than to part with our religion, and offend God. Such an obedience is indeed difficult to those who are inclined to a slothful security, and love the world immoderately, and are not deeply affected with the rewards and punishments of the next state: but it may be practised by those who can govern themselves, and who have a lively sense of the great advantages present and future which are secured by piety; and by such it is more easily observed than a heavy multitude of rites and ceremonies.

This Christian obedience is described in the New Testament by different words and expressions. Sometimes it is called, to love God, sometimes

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sometimes to fear and reverence him. We may be said to love God, when we think honourably of him, gratefully acknowledge his goodness, and prefer his commands to all other considerations. The fear of God is a fear lest, by an improper behaviour, we should shew ourselves unthankful to our best Benefactor; it is a fear lest we should incur his displeasure, not only because he can deprive us of happiness, and inflict punishments upon us, but principally because he is so good to us, and imposes nothing upon us which it is not our interest to perform.

Christ also required of his followers to shew openly their faith and love and reverence towards God, to confess their Saviour before men, upon all proper occasions, to excite others to the same disposition and behaviour, and to meet together for the exercise of religious duties. He also declared, that wheresoever his servants should be assembled together in his name, he would be spiritually with them. He also promised that his Church should never be destroyed, that it should last till the consummation of all things; which promise he hath hitherto fulfilled for more than seventeen hundred years. As to the order and method that

should be observed in such assemblies, he gave no particular precepts, but left it to his Apostles. Religious government, like civil government, is absolutely necessary in some form or other; but all forms of government are in their own nature indifferent, and so Christian nations have a right to appoint that which suits them best, remembering the direction of the Apostle, Let all things be done decently and in order.

And because men are more affected with actions than with words, and all religions had their ceremonies, it was fit that Christians should have something of this kind. Therefore Christ appointed two religious rites, but very easy, very plain, and simple, and most remote from vain pomp, or superstition, by which Christians should profess their belief in him, acknowledge themselves his servants, keep his benefits in remembrance, and declare their friendship for each other. One was Baptism, which was no new thing to the Jews, for it had been practised by them, and also by John the Baptist; nor was it less known to the Gentiles. By this ceremony of initiation, Christians declared themselves servants of God, and of Christ, and of the Holy Ghost; were reminded that they must cleanse themselves from
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from iniquity, and live a more pure and holy life; and that as they descended into the water and rose up from it, so they must die to sin and rise again to righteousness. The other was the Lord's Supper, which he instituted in memory of his death, and which shews, that they who eat together of the same bread, and drink of the same cup, should account each other as brethren who belong to one family. At the same time Christians profess that they continue in that covenant which Christ ratified by his blood, and that they will endeavour to obey his precepts, and to follow his example. These are ceremonies easy to be performed, and as easy to be understood, if we will content ourselves with the account which the writers of the New Testament have given of them.

From all that hath been said it appears that the end and design of religion was not to afflict and oppress us, but to make us happy. God can take no pleasure in the miseries and sorrows of men: he created us to do us good, not to do us harm. He gave us freedom of action, without which we could neither practise nor understand virtue; but the consequence of freedom is, that we are changeable, and capable of transgressing. Therefore he

hath also given us laws, instructions, motives, encouragements, and assistances. It must be confessed, that no man, except our Saviour, ever performed the whole of his duty so perfectly, that he could claim rewards from God on that account. But God requireth not of his servants this sublime holiness; he requires of them that they should preserve themselves from obstinate impenitence and from vicious habits, and, when they have trespassed, that they should repent and amend. Great reason have they therefore to return him continual thanks, and to acknowledge his infinite mercy, which thus stoops and condescends to their infirmity.

If God, without any apparent cause for it, had required of men costly gifts, and sacrifices which might have reduced them to poverty, and the observation of difficult and unimproving ceremonies, these indeed would have been hard laws: but the Christian religion imposeth nothing like this upon us. If the Gentiles believed that such things were required from them, they fell into such errors through their own fault, through the mean conceptions which they entertained concerning the Deity. If the Jews were in some measure burdened with

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with laws of this nature, the reason was, because they had corrupted themselves, and fallen into many of the errors of the Gentiles, so that God, as a lawgiver, was obliged, if we may use that expression, to give them precepts suitable, not so much to his own nature, and to the dictates of reason, as to their carnal minds and stubborn temper. And yet he, by his Prophets, instructed them in the superior excellence of morality, and invited them to repentance, with favourable promises of pardon and acceptance, and unfolded to them the spiritual part of religion at intervals and by degrees, as they were capable of receiving it. So that in this also they had great reason to praise and celebrate his long-suffering and goodness.

Thus much may suffice concerning our duty to God, as far as it may be distinguished from our duty to our neighbour and to ourselves.

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S E R M O N XVI.

TITUS ii. 11, 12.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

WE are here exhorted by the Apostle to live soberly, righteously, and godly. Sobriety comprehends our duty to ourselves, righteousness our duty to our neighbour, and godliness our duty to God.

I proceed now to consider that part of our duty which relates to our neighbour, and which is here called, living righteously or justly. Righteousness frequently means all religion in general ; but as it stands in the text distinguished from godliness and sobriety, it means our duty to our neighbour, which in other places of the

the New Testament is called brotherly love, or charity.

1. Under these names of righteousness, of love, and of charity, the Gospel comprehends all those kind offices which we ought to perform towards others. This friendly behaviour is called love, because if we love a person, first, we never envy him, or hurt him knowingly and wilfully, but, secondly, wish him all happiness, and assist him as far as we are able; under which two heads is comprehended our duty to our neighbour. This our Saviour commands, when he explains and improves that precept of the Law, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The same thing he expresses in other words thus: Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye so unto them. The same precept is to be found in the Book of Tobit, in a form of prohibition; Do that to no man which thou hatest. The meaning is, Whatsoever we should certainly and reasonably expect from another, if we were in his circumstances, and he in ours, that we ought to do to him; and whatsoever we should account ill usage, if we suffered it, that we ought not to do. Concerning this charity, or brotherly affection,

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St. Paul hath discoursed in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, and hath given it the preference even to faith and to hope. A virtue so reasonable could not be unknown to the Pagans; their wise men have also recommended it, though they call it by other names, and have not extended it so far as our Saviour hath.

2. Mutual justice and equity are required from us. Justice is that virtue by which we give to every man what is his due by the law of nature, and by the laws of civil society, and abstain from all injury either in word or in deed, in omission or in commission. Thus far justice proceeds: Equity goes still farther; for there are many things which our country requires not of us, and for neglecting which none can call us before the magistrate, which yet an equitable person cannot omit without condemning himself. These sort of duties depend upon a great variety of circumstances, of facts, of persons, of times and places, which may be such, that it would be unreasonable to act according to strict right, though the laws would give us leave to do it.

3. The Gospel requires that we should be charitable towards all persons, as far as we are able, and they are deserving, by shewing them

favour and countenance, by using our interest in their behalf, by giving them our help, and by relieving their wants, especially when they are reduced to straits, and unable to provide for themselves.

It is not possible to fix the exact bounds and limits of such liberality, especially in countries like this, where the laws of the land have made a stated and a large provision for the poor; so that this public charity is at the same time the private charity of every person who willingly discharges his part and proportion. What is to be done beyond this, must in a great measure be left to every one's discretion. To do more than this, is certainly the duty of several persons; and the truest objects of such charity are often they who neither ask it nor receive it from the public. Our Saviour, in the Gospel of St. Luke, commands us to give alms of such things as we have, that is, according to our present circumstances, and proportionably to our fortunes; which being a general direction, and not descending to particulars, we have no right, that I can discern, to burden the consciences of others with fixed rules about it. Only we are to exhort them to take care that they fall not short of our Saviour's intention. The ancient Christians

tians remarkably fulfilled these precepts, which was no small credit to them and their religion, and greatly conduced to recommend the Gospel to the world, and to further its progress.

4. The Gospel requires of us in a singular manner humanity and meekness. Humanity teacheth us to temper all our words and actions towards our neighbour with civility and goodness, and to abstain carefully from all severe and harsh expressions, all cross and rude behaviour. Meekness restrains our anger, and keeps it in due bounds, so that we neither fly out into an unseemly passion at the faults of others, nor into railing and reviling, nor harbour malice and revenge in our hearts. We are all of us offended at insolence, contempt, anger and ill usage; we are pleased when we meet with a contrary behaviour; and consequently this dislike and this approbation should be a rule to us in our conduct towards others. Therefore Christ condemns anger and its effects, and shews, that he gives a more excellent precept than is contained in the Mosaic law; for, having observed that the law forbade murder, Thou shalt not kill; he adds, But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment. This is to be understood

derstood of unjust and immoderate anger, which is joined with a desire of revenge, or with a proud and ill-grounded scorn of our neighbour: for we may be angry, when the cause is just, when we keep our anger within due bounds, when it hath no other aim than self-preservation, when it is accompanied with a design of reforming the offender, and not of doing him an injury, and when it excludes not a readiness to forgive him, and to be reconciled to him upon his amendment. Be ye angry, and sin not, says St. Paul; and let not the sun go down upon your wrath; —but let all bitterness, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. Christ himself was filled with anger and indignation against some of the Jews; but at the same time he was ready to be reconciled to them, and to receive them favourably, if they would have returned to their duty, and his last words were a prayer to God to forgive them.

By meekness and humanity contentions and quarrels are avoided, with all their pernicious consequences, and the friendship, good-will and esteem of the world is usually secured. But care is to be taken, that, instead of these virtues, we fall not into those vices which have a resemblance of them, and be concealed under that fair
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and false appearance: such is a feigned civility and complaisance, which often covers a base and perfidious heart; flattery, which is as ready to commend or excuse vice, as to praise what is praise-worthy; and a mean compliance which approves, or seems to approve, the worst of actions. These are as hurtful as meekness and humanity are useful to society.

These virtues St. Paul hath in view, when in his Epistle to the Romans he exhorts Christians, In honour to prefer one another, to shew respect and civility to others, without waiting to see whether they will shew as much to us. And St. Peter's direction is, Honour all men. If therefore rudeness and inhumanity, and harshness of behaviour be found in Christians, and in Christians who pretend to great holiness and zeal and piety, this is not to be laid to the charge of Christianity, or of those who first preached it; but it is the fault of those who understand not, or are not willing to understand the plain precepts of the Gospel.

5. To these virtues is fitly joined the love of peace and concord, both in things relating to this world, and in things relating to religion, whether they be matters of belief, or rites and ceremonies and discipline. But as all virtues have

have a natural union, and can never disagree, without ceasing to be what they are, the love of peace must always be joined with the love of truth and righteousness; and concord is to be so pursued, that we injure not the duty which we owe to God and to ourselves. The regard due to peace requires of every person, that he seek not only his own particular profit and convenience, but the advantage of others, and the common good of society; and by such methods public peace is settled and preserved.

But because every person hath his own private possessions, without which he cannot support himself and his family, it is impossible for us to live in concord with those who endeavour to wrong and defraud us; we must at least avoid such a person, as an enemy with whom we can hold no intercourse: and likewise if any one by threats and violence would force us to act contrary to truth and virtue, even the sincerest lover of peace must renounce all society with such a tyrant, lest he should give up those things which in their own nature are most excellent and most useful to mankind, and which God hath expressly commanded us never to forsake. If it be possible, says the Apostle, as far as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men:

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men: as far as reason and religion permit, be at peace with others, and let not matters of small consequence, or those faults and defects from which none is entirely free, interrupt and destroy that union.

Christians are members of two Societies; as they are men, they belong to the country in which they are born or settled; and as they are Christians, they belong to the Church of Christ. But as this Church universal, or Catholic Church, is dispersed over the earth, and cannot assemble together, it was even from ancient times divided into particular and national Churches. Every Christian then should be desirous and willing to join himself to his own national Church, if he can do it with a safe conscience; and in this affair, he should not give way to small and endless scruples, nor expect that every thing should be conducted exactly as he could wish; for perfection dwelleth not here below, and wise men must either bear with some things which they do not approve and cannot mend, or they must form a religion for themselves, and serve God all alone, which is by no means agreeable with mutual edification and with the social nature of Christianity.

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But when things are come to such a pass in any nation, that Christians are required to reject and abjure evident truths, to approve monstrous absurdities, and flagrant contradictions, to sacrifice reason and common sense to a thing most improperly called Faith, and to pay a blind and slavish obedience to the doctrines, and to the false doctrines of men, such a Church cannot be accounted a truly religious society, nor is it lawful to hold communion with her. For these and other weighty reasons our ancestors separated themselves from the Court and the See of Rome, and began the Reformation.

The Apostles, at first, did not separate themselves from the Jews, though they differed greatly from them, as long as they were permitted in the Synagogues to profess their belief in Christ, to preach his doctrine, and to reject every thing contrary to it; but when this liberty was no longer granted to them, they held their own assemblies apart, and forsook the Synagogue. After this, some dissension arose in the Christian congregations which were formed of converted Jews and Gentiles; for the Jews stuck obstinately to their old rites and ceremonies, and the Gentiles refused to observe

observe them. But because in other respects the Gospel was obeyed by both, and neither were compelled to do any thing that they held to be unlawful, this difference of opinion was to be mutually tolerated, as St. Paul declares. As for himself, to the weak he became weak, that he might gain the weak : he was made all things to all men, that he might by all means save some. The meaning is, that he thought it a part of Christian prudence to comply with his brethren in matters indifferent, and to gratify them in all things consistent with Christianity.

6. For the same causes Christ commands us to pass over injuries, whether they affect our goods, our reputation, or our body, if they are such as may be borne without great detriment ; and permits us not on such occasions to avenge ourselves, or to have recourse to the laws and to the civil magistrate for redress. The law of Moses laid no great restraint upon the Jews in this respect ; and somewhat more of forbearance is required from us than was from them. Ye have heard, says our Lord, that it hath been said, An eye for an eye,—but I say unto you, Resist not evil. The best Commentators have shewed that these and the

like precepts, if rightly understood, are in themselves very fit, and very profitable to society: for whilst we connive at a small offence or injury, we put a stop to much hatred and strife and variance, of which there would be no end, if no man would put up any affront. Besides, it often comes to pass that he who hath done the wrong is softened and reclaimed by Christian lenity. But in greater injuries, nothing hinders a man from seeking the assistance of the laws and of the magistrate, or if that cannot be done, from acting in his own defence; for indeed without such a permission no civil society could subsist, and all good men would in a manner be bound hand and foot, and delivered up to the vilest of mankind.

There have been some few of exalted minds amongst the Gentiles who disapproved and condemned revenge. But our Saviour hath carried the duty farther, and hath told us that we must love our enemies, and return good for evil, and pray for those who use us despitefully, and imitate our heavenly Father, who is kind even to the unthankful and to the wicked.

Many of the Jews and Gentiles accounted revenge to be lawful, and derided Christian patience as a practice absurd and contrary to human

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human nature. Yet what the Gospel requires of this kind, if we mistake it not, is very commendable. If we had been commanded to shew particular friendship to wicked men who revile and injure us, to account them worthy and honest persons, to furnish them with power and opportunity to hurt us, and not to be upon our guard against them, these indeed would have been hard sayings. But it is not so; we are commanded to love them so far as to pity their faults and follies, and to shew them such lenity, forbearance, and kindness, such humanity and civility as can be of no detriment to us, to pray to God for their repentance, and if they prove by their behaviour that they repent and are amended, to receive them into favour.

None can say that these precepts are impracticable. On the contrary, they are so reasonable, that without mutual indulgences of this kind human society can hardly subsist, and frail and fallible creatures cannot live together in tolerable peace and order, unless patience and forgiveness be in some degree approved and exercised.

7. If Christ requires of us thus to bear and to pardon wrongs and offences, and to return good for evil, much more doth he expect that

we should love our friends and benefactors, and requite kindnesſes with the ſame, or, if it be poſſible, with greater favours. If therefore the Apoſtles had been ſilent concerning gratitude, yet it had been plain enough that the whole tenour of the New Teſtament required this virtue. But our Saviour commended the gratitude of the Samaritan leper, who returned to give him thanks for his cure, and St. Paul, in his Epiſtle to the Coloſſians, having exhorted them to meekneſs, long-ſuffering, forbearance, and charity, adds theſe words; And be ye thankful; that is, be grateful both to God and man. And in his ſecond Epiſtle to Timothy, deſcribing thoſe wicked men who ſhould ariſe in the Church, he ſays that they ſhould be lovers of their ownſelves, and unthankful.

8. The duties above-mentioned relate to all men in general, and are to be practiſed by every one through the whole courſe of his life. There are beſides theſe, duties particular to each perſon, according to his age, rank, condition, and the relation in which he ſtands to others. Such are the duties of huſbands and wives, of parents and children, of maſters and ſervants, of young and old,

Marriage

Marriage is reduced by our Saviour to its original institution, as it was in the beginning, before the passions of men had broken through the rules which right reason prescribed, and by polygamy had brought poverty, jealousy, and discord into houses, and many troubles and mischiefs into the world; to which had been added another evil, that of frequent divorces upon frivolous causes. The Gospel requires of those who enter into this state that they pass their days together in concord and friendship, and in a joint care of their families.

The Gospel requires that behaviour from parents to children and from children to parents, which all wise men must approve. It commands parents to educate their children in the fear of God, and to give them all necessary instruction and maintenance, and neither to spoil them by foolish indulgence, nor to use them harshly and imperiously, and provoke them to wrath, by which they will alienate their affection, and may drive them to take bad courses. They are to be guided by admonishment and reason; unless they be of incorrigible dispositions.

It commands children to honour and love and succour their parents, to obey them in all things,

and in the Lord, that is in all things which are agreeable to Christianity, or not contrary to it ; for in that case, He that loveth father or mother more than me, says our Lord, is not worthy of me.

But this is a plea for disobedience that rarely happens : and there is more danger in Christian nations, that children should pay too little than too much respect to father and mother. One of the great evils which Monckery brought into the Christian world, was the inveigling and stealing of young persons, and receiving them into religious orders, without the consent, and against the consent of their parents. In this the Monks acted like true disciples of the Pharisees, who compassed sea and land to make proselytes, and who also taught children to disobey their parents : and you will find it to have been and to be the practice of all fanatics of every sort and tribe, to seduce young people from that deference which they ought to pay to those whom God and nature have appointed for their guides and guardians in their tender years.

In the time when the Gospel was first preached, servants for the most part were slaves ; and as many of these were converted to Christianity, with or without their masters, it was to be feared

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ed lest they should take too much upon them, and think too well of themselves, by entering into a religion which commanded all men to treat one another as brethren. This might have brought a discredit upon the Gospel, and have been an hindrance of its progress. Therefore St. Peter and St. Paul earnestly exhort servants or slaves to obey their masters, and to be industrious, and honest, and dutifully to serve not only the just and gentle, but the harsh and froward.

The law of nature knows no such thing as slavery, for by nature all men are free and equal: but by the civil laws and by the practice of nations it was established, and it still continues amongst those who know not the Gospel, and, the more is the shame and the pity, it is to be found in some places where Christianity is professed. The religion of Christ, when it first made its progress in the world, left the civil laws of nations, in a great measure, as it found them, lest by altering or repealing them it should bring confusion and disturbance into human society; but as by its own genius and tendency it leads men gently back to the precepts of nature and equity, to kindness and to mercy, it put an end by degrees, in most civilized

lized places, to that excessive distance and difference between masters and slaves, which owed its original to outrage and war, to violence and calamity: so that in Christian countries the service which is performed is usually, as it ought to be, voluntary and by agreement.

But what the writers of the New Testament have said concerning slaves, holds true concerning hired servants, and all those who are employed in other denominations under a master, that they discharge their office modestly, diligently, and willingly, and act with faithfulness and integrity in every thing that is committed to them.

To all masters the Gospel enjoins that they be good and just, forbearing haughtiness, insolence, and threatening, and remembering that they also have a master in heaven.

The same sort of directions may be applied to all who are invested with power in any office or station, and to all who are placed under their government.

Of those who are appointed to teach Christianity, it is required that they study and endeavour to preach it in its own native and amiable simplicity, even as it is contained in the holy Scriptures, and that their aim and intention be
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to do honour to religion, and to make men wiser and better. This also tends to create and preserve a mutual esteem between those who teach, and those who are taught, than which there can be nothing more desirable both to the one and to the other; for the world passeth away with all its concerns, but the good effect of brotherly love and Christian edification is stable and permanent.

Of young people it is required that they be of a teachable and tractable temper, and that they furnish themselves by times with useful knowledge and skill, which will enable them to live contentedly and reputably. It is also required of them, that they pay respect to the aged, and be willing to serve and assist them both on account of the bodily infirmities which attend that part of life, and because it will be their own state if God gives them length of days, and because humanity suggests that we should be courteous to those who probably will not stay long with us, and because the aged have commonly more knowledge and discretion, and can instruct the young in things of importance.

From the aged it is expected, that they be endued with Christian virtues, and set a good example

Example to others, since they have the advantage of long observation to make them sensible of the folly of vice, and the beauty and utility of goodness. Age also tempers and weakens the passions, except in those who are enslaved to wicked habits; age also usually brings prudence and judgment; and these things render the old very capable of assisting and directing the young, especially when they can make proper allowances for the warmth and the defects of youth, and can preserve themselves free from austerity and moroseness. Lastly, it becomes them to meditate on death, as on a change which is near at hand, and to be prepared to go hence with decency and resignation.

Concerning the duty of Kings, the Apostles have said nothing, because at that time there were no Christian rulers. The law of nature, and the laws of their own nations, and the law of Moses, and the Gospel, are sufficient to teach them their office, and to shew them that the power which their country hath committed to them is a power only to do good, and to restrain evil, and to promote the public welfare.

But concerning the duty of subjects to their Princes, the New Testament is not silent. The Apostles recommend, in general expressions, submission

submission and obedience to all who are in authority. St. Paul observes upon this head, that there is no power but from God, and that the powers which be are ordained of God. The meaning is, that civil government is agreeable to the will of God, and ariseth from the nature of things; for God hath so made mankind, that neither can they subsist without society, nor society without government, nor government without rulers. It is therefore the duty of every private person to be a quiet and a peaceable subject, to do nothing which tends to introduce discord and confusion and the ruin of the state; but to defend his country on all occasions and with all his power.

Lastly, there is a particular duty incumbent upon every person, and arising from his particular occupation, state, office, or profession, namely, that he acquire the skill and the knowledge which shall make him fit for it, fit to act in it prudently and honestly; else whatsoever virtues and good qualities he may possess, he is inexcusable both with God and man.

Such is our duty to our neighbour, as it may be collected from reason and revelation.

S E R M O N XVII.

TITUS ii. 11, 12.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

WE are here exhorted by the Apostle to live soberly, righteously, and godly, Sobriety comprehends our duty to ourselves, righteousness our duty to our neighbour, and godliness our duty to God.

I shall conclude my observations upon the text with examining that part of our duty which, although it hath some reference both to God and to our neighbour, yet relates more immediately to ourselves. This St. Paul calls, living soberly. The word * *Sobriety* hath a more exten-

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five signification in the original, than in our language, and comprehends it in a right exercise of our reason and of our natural powers, and a discreet government of our passions.

Amongst the helps which God hath bestowed upon us, to lead us to obedience and to happiness, may be reckoned certain useful dispositions and propensities, which are called natural inclinations, which we feel more or less as soon as we come to the use of reason, and which, if we do not corrupt and stifle them, will be confirmed and improved by daily experience, and appear both profitable and commendable. These serve as a counterbalance to those passions which incline us to evil.

First of all then, men are so formed by their Creator, that they love truth and hate falsehood. No one chooseth to mistake, to err, and to be deceived; every one is willing and desirous to see things as they really are. We may safely take it for granted that there are none so brutish, so savage, and so ignorant, as not to approve truth and blame falsehood in general. Consequently they must acknowledge that it is ugly and wicked to deceive, and that it is good and amiable to instruct.

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By the same use of reason men see that it is better in general to do good than to do hurt to another, and they generally own it, unless some violent passion prevails with them, and stifles the dictates of nature. When the mind grows calm, and capable of exercising its powers, they discover the fitness of such a behaviour, they wish that others would act so towards them, and they endeavour to perform themselves what they thus approve in others.

Hence by steps and degrees we are able to acquire right notions of all sorts of virtues and vices. Every virtuous disposition is advantageous to ourselves and to others, and every vicious habit is hurtful to ourselves and to others. But it must be remembered that the usefulness arising from virtue is not to be considered as confined to a few actions, or to a few men, or to a short space of time: the whole race of mankind, as far as we can be connected with them, and the whole duration of our life, and our future state likewise, are to be taken into consideration. What therefore is useful upon the whole, is agreeable to virtue; and that is to be called vicious which hath a contrary effect; and we say that men would promote the general happiness, and their own at the same time,

if they would observe the rule of doing good to all; and that the opposite behaviour will be pernicious to them. To observe this rule, is to live according to the dictates of unprejudiced reason, or to live according to nature, and to pursue the end for which they are called into being; and in acting thus there is a decency and a dignity, whence arise self-approbation and satisfaction of mind. Every one, if he will consult his own heart, and speak his thoughts sincerely, must own that virtue is beautiful and honourable, and worthy of love and praise; and that vice is deformed, and shameful, and detestable. Nothing can silence this opinion, which naturally rises in our minds, except some violent passion depriving us of the free use of reason.

Hence we collect and conclude, that almighty God hath implanted in human nature those inclinations which make us love virtue and truth wherever they appear and shew themselves to us, and shun vice, error, and falsehood, when we know them to be what they are. Hence likewise it follows, that the goodness and decency, or the dishonesty and deformity of actions, depend not at all upon the will and the appointment of men, and of human laws, but upon the nature
itself.

itself and the relation and connection of things, which is fixed and unchangeable: for as truth and falsehood depend not upon us, so neither do virtue and vice. This unalterable nature of good and evil, of right and wrong, and these judgments concerning it, which our own senses and apprehensions lead us to make, are helps which God hath given us against the power and the temptations of sin. When a man doth ill, he inwardly condemns himself; when he doth well, he approves his own behaviour. This St. Paul hath in view, when he says concerning the Gentiles, When the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law to themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

I. The first duty then which we owe to ourselves, is to cultivate and improve that natural inclination which we have to love truth and virtue: for this is the foundation of all goodness, that we be able to distinguish truth from falsehood, that we esteem it when we have found it, and that we prefer what is right and honest to every thing that is evil and base. Unless we

love truth, we shall either never find it, or, if we accidentally meet with it, we shall set no due value upon it. Truth shuns those who despise it, or becomes as useless to them as if it were quite unknown. By the assistance of truth we arrive to a knowledge of virtue, and we are taught to esteem it as we ought; they are united together: without truth there can be no virtue, and without virtue truth is of small use.

There are an innumerable variety of truths, of which those of the greatest use and importance are the knowledge of God, and of religion, and of ourselves, and of eternal life, and of the way to happiness both here and hereafter. The Gospel of Christ is frequently called the Truth by the sacred writers; and above all other things it most deserveth that honourable name and character, because it surpasseth all other aids and methods for the discovering of this most valuable knowledge. Christ promised to his Apostles the Spirit of truth, who should lead them into all truth, that is, all necessary truths relating to morality and religion. Christ prays to his Father that he would sanctify them in truth, and says that his word is truth. When he stood before Pilate, he professed that for this end he came into the world, that he might bear witness to

to the truth ; and every one, says he, that is of the truth, heareth my voice. For whosoever sincerely loves the truth, and diligently seeks it, will acknowledge and receive the Gospel, when Christ himself and his Apostles teach and confirm it. We are of God, says St. John ; he that knoweth God, heareth us ; he that is not of God, heareth not us ; hereby we know the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of error. Thus the first duty which we owe to ourselves is to love truth and virtue.

The Hebrew language hath no word which exactly answers to the word virtue ; therefore this word is scarcely to be found in the writers of the New Testament. Instead of it, they say righteousness, holiness, the fear of God, and the like ; by which expressions the same thing is meant. However, St. Paul in one place uses the word virtue, and recommends the love of virtue and of truth in very strong terms : Finally, brethren, says he, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both

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learned,

learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the peace of God shall be with you. From which, and the like exhortations, it is manifest that the love of truth and virtue, which the Gospel recommends and requires, is not a bare occupation of the understanding, a barren speculative enquiry concerning the nature of morality, but a practical knowledge of it dwelling in our hearts, by which, when we have found out truth, and know what is virtue, we suit our life and behaviour to our persuasion, openly profess the truth, and recommend it to others, and shew forth virtue in our manners and conversation, whatsoever inconveniences may press us, and whatsoever dangers may threaten us, for our adherence to them.

2. The Gospel commands us to think modestly of ourselves, and to shew forth this modesty in our words and actions, which is called humility by Christian writers, and is founded upon a right knowledge of ourselves. When we are well acquainted with our own defects, and sensible how far short we fall of perfect goodness and knowledge, this usually produces in us dispositions to think and speak lowly of ourselves, and not ambitiously to seek employments for which we are not qualified, recompences and respects

respects to which we have no claim, and praises and honours which we have done nothing to deserve; this teacheth us to acquiesce in that station wherein the providence of God hath placed us; to be moderate, and peaceable, and honest in our endeavours to advance ourselves to a better condition; and to have the public good, and the interests of Christianity, more in view than our own private profit. Else if any one thinketh himself to be somewhat when he is nothing, such an one, says St. Paul, deceiveth himself. By this virtue the mind is kept free from pride, insolence, vanity, self-love, and self-conceit.

However it is to be remembered, that humility may be carried to an excess, and that by debasing ourselves too much, and giving way too tamely to oppression and insolence, or by a sheepish indolence and an over-diffidence of our abilities, we may wrong both ourselves, and our friends, and society, to which we might have been serviceable. If it is our duty to be modest and humble, and quiet and peaceable, it is likewise our duty to be useful to mankind, and to employ whatever powers and talents God hath committed to us for the public good.

By this virtue we are disposed not to despise our inferiors, but to value the good qualities of others, and willingly to commend them; in the exercising of which duty, it is much better to think too favourably than too hardly of any person, and rather to esteem him too much than to detract from him. For although we are by no means to praise others against our own conscience, and for those accomplishments of which they are entirely and manifestly void, yet since they who in some respects are our inferiors, in other respects often equal or surpass us, we have continual occasion to exercise humility and candour, in giving to every one all the regard and all the respect that he can reasonably desire. This behaviour the Apostles require from us: Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God. All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, that is, on his own profit and interest, but every man also on the things of others.

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3. If we would perform our part in life as becomes reasonable creatures and Christians, it is necessary that we possess in some degree the virtue called prudence, by which all other virtues are regulated and conducted, by which we are restrained from acting rashly and hastily, we weigh the circumstances of things, and then we do what certainly or probably tends to the public good. This behaviour concerns our whole life, and all our words and actions, which, unless they be accompanied with discretion and foresight, may prove pernicious to ourselves and our neighbour, though our intentions were not evil. In the Proverbs of Solomon, and in the book of Ecclesiasticus, there are many useful precepts of this kind; and our Saviour hath exhorted us to join the prudence of the serpent to the simplicity of the dove. Christian prudence is often occupied in forming right judgments of religious truths, duties, actions, and opinions. It preserves us from being imposed upon by deceitful or mistaken men, in things relating to faith or practice; it directs us to adhere to the plain word of God, as it is contained in the Scriptures, in all that we are to believe and to do. By the assistance of this virtue we prove all things, and hold fast

fast that which is good, according to the advice of St. Paul ; we believe not every Spirit, as St. John admonisheth, but try the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets are come into the world. Else we might fall into numberless errors ; for every age, and every nation, usually produceth a plentiful harvest of deceivers ; and he who is unsteady and unwary will never want a false guide to mislead him.

4. The writers of the New Testament frequently and strictly command us to observe the rules of temperance in our food, and in all lawful pleasures and natural inclinations : by which it is not their design to deprive us of the conveniences of life, but to make us beware lest by the abuse of things innocent and useful we should render our souls and bodies unfit to perform their several functions ; lest we should waste our fortunes, and impoverish ourselves and our dependents ; and lest we should corrupt others by bad example. Therefore the Gospel forbids drunkenness, debauchery, extravagance, and intemperance, and all such irregularities, and recommends chastity and sobriety : and these precepts it enjoins altogether for our own
sakes,

fakes, for the good of each individual, and of families, and of human society.

5. Men are so made, and such is their condition, that they who indulge themselves in laziness, will want many things necessary both for soul and body. Whatsoever state of life we be in, we cannot live reputably without labour. Therefore wise men in all times have agreed in condemning idleness, as pernicious to human nature, and a scandalous abuse of those powers and abilities which God hath conferred upon us. And there is the more reason to detest it, because sluggish people are not only destitute of the conveniences of life, and of a mind capable of enjoying them, but are remarkably prone to every thing that is bad, as experience testifies. When poverty and laziness take possession of a man, lying, and cheating, and stealing are the usual consequences, together with every kind of shameless and sordid meanness, dissingenuity, and dishonesty. Besides, the human mind is naturally restless, and occupied continually upon some object and design. It is the unavoidable consequence of being awake. Unless therefore the mind be improved by honest meditations, and employed in useful labours, it gives itself up to expensive amusements,

amusements, to loose imaginations, to unlawful actions, to keeping bad company and bad hours, or to strolling from one assembly to another, or to drinking or gaming, which are very improperly called diversions and recreations, and only serve to add to the miseries and calamities of life, instead of alleviating or removing them. We have received from God a soul and a body, and we are obliged to take due care of both. The soul is to be exercised in acquiring useful knowledge, without which we shall be blinded by ignorance, and swayed by vice, and fall into many faults which might easily have been avoided. The body is to be occupied in such exercises as may strengthen it, and make it capable of performing what the understanding recommends as proper to be done; and thus we become able to accomplish what our own nature requires, what our friends, and families, and society may justly hope and expect from us. These are the dictates of reason, and these dictates are enforced and recommended to us by the sacred Writers. This is a faithful saying, says St. Paul to Titus, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: these

these things are good and profitable unto men. And again : Let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful. To maintain good works, is translated in the margin, to profess honest trades. Let every Christian be of some calling and occupation, that he may live creditably and usefully to himself and others. This precept belongs, in some sense, to all persons, to kings and nobles as well as to the poorest people, that they may know how to act suitably to their several conditions. Great revenues, and power, and honour are given or trusted to men, for no other purpose than to enable them to govern those who are committed to their hands, and to provide for the public welfare : and to perform the offices of such a station with tolerable credit and dignity, is a charge which requireth industry and application, and many good qualities. As to the bulk of mankind, the case is too clear to want proof. To such belongs the admonition of St. Paul, who having declared concerning himself that he had often wrought with labour and travail night and day, that he might not be chargeable to others, recommends to Christians the same behaviour : If any will not work, says he,

he, neither should he eat. There are some who walk disorderly amongst you, working not at all, but are busy bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, eating their own bread.

6. There is a virtue extending itself to many parts of our Christian duty, which is called contentedness. It is an even disposition, by which, without repining and complaining, we bear our condition though it be inconvenient; and it is founded on a firm faith and reliance upon the providence of God, and upon his veracity in performing his promises; as likewise upon a knowledge of our many defects, by which we are sensible that if God were to deal with us in strict justice, according to our deserts, our state might be much worse than it is. Whosoever firmly believes that the course of things in general, and every particular event, is guided by the Divine providence, with perfect wisdom and goodness, for the good of his creatures, especially of those who serve him, will easily persuade himself that God hath reasons for which he permits some to suffer hardships, and to be exercised with adversity. These reasons he will believe to be sufficient, though perhaps

perhaps he know them not in their full extent; nor will he suffer any dishonourable thoughts and hard suspicions concerning God's goodness to harbour in his mind, since God hath graciously declared that patience under affliction shall receive an ample reward in the world to come; and that those things which seem grievous to be borne, and which human nature would willingly shun, often conduce to the health of the soul, and often preserve us from many faults to which a continuance of prosperity exposeth us. The discourses of our Saviour and of his Apostles abound with exhortations to contentment under a low and inconvenient state, and with great encouragement and favourable promises to those who trust in God, and are satisfied with the portion which he allots to them. And indeed this virtue is of singular use to all who would learn to pass quietly and safely through this world to a better. He whose desires are moderate, meets with few temptations and few disappointments; but he whose heart is set upon wealth, though he possess much, is ever desiring something more, and therefore never at heart's ease; and, if he meet with losses, becomes most miserable, though he still possesses what a person contented with a little

little would think more than sufficient, and is ready to take unjustifiable methods with a view to retrieve his fortunes. Of such singular advantage is it to desire no more than uncorrupted nature requires, and so greatly doth it conduce even to our present happiness. Therefore the Gospel condemns not only covetousness, which, as St. Paul says, is idolatry, but a greedy desire of external advantages, of high stations, of power and worldly prosperity.

A contempt of riches is so often inculcated in the New Testament, that it seems needless to bring proofs of it. Scarcely is there any thing which is more earnestly coveted than wealth, and yet there is not any thing innocent in itself whence greater evils arise; and this is the reason why Christ requires of us not to set our hearts upon it: he required it out of mere kindness and compassion towards men, who know not what is expedient for them. For whether we have received our riches from our ancestors, or acquired them ourselves, so it happens, that through our own folly they often do us much more harm than good. They are often attended either with covetousness, or with luxury, and a vehement love of pleasure. When they are joined to covetousness, the fear
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of losses with which such persons are tormented is worse than poverty itself, they labour under apprehensions of evils which may never come, or which human prudence cannot prevent; they are sordid and uncharitable, and therefore disliked and despised, and they can hardly refrain from any thing mean and vile, when there is a prospect of gain. When riches are joined to luxury, such persons indeed are not slaves to their wealth, but which is rather worse, they are slaves to their passions and appetites, to a thousand follies and vices.

Not that we are to give away all our possessions, and reduce ourselves to a state of poverty, a state which hath its temptations no less than a state of superfluous abundance: only we are to remember that these things are entrusted to us, and that we must make a sober and discreet use of them, that use which God, and nature, and society require.

7. To contentedness should be added modesty, a virtue by which we are taught never to say or do any thing which becomes not our Christian character, but to avoid all that is rude and indecent. To this virtue relate these exhortations of St. Paul, Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but

that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers. Fornication and all uncleanness—let it not once be named amongst you, as becometh Saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient.

If these things are not even to be named, much less are they to be practised by Christians: and the Apostle is the more earnest in recommending this modesty in words and actions to the first believers, because the Gentiles were notorious offenders in this point.

To this modesty is to be joined moderation in our apparel, and consequently in our furniture, and in all our expences. Of this St. Peter and St. Paul make some mention, and observe at the same time that the endowments of the mind are the best and fairest ornament. No precise bounds can be fixed to duties of this kind, and a reasonable latitude must be left for compliance with custom. The best general rule is to follow the example of those of our own rank and condition who are accounted wise and prudent, and free from vanity and extravagance: and these restrictions cannot be called rigid and severe, since they only forbid a profusion which is attended with numberless evils.

Lastly,

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Lastly, in the exercise of all the fore-mentioned virtues is contained and consists the duty which is called self-denial, and which our Saviour requires from his disciples. To deny ourselves is, first, to cast off all vicious inclinations and unlawful desires ; secondly, to reject and avoid every thing that we find by experience to be a temptation and an incitement to sin ; and thirdly, to be willing to part with any object, if ever we should be placed in such circumstances, that either that object or our religion must be quitted.

Such is our duty to ourselves, to which we shall endeavour to conform, if we love ourselves with a rational affection, and set a just value on our better part, on our immortal soul.

Firstly, in the manner of all the other
 things which are contained and brought forth
 which is called self-motion, and which is
 having a beginning, and a middle, and an end.
 Secondly, in the manner of all the other
 things which are contained and brought forth
 which is called self-motion, and which is
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 Thirdly, in the manner of all the other
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S E R M O N XVIII.

LUKE vi. 13.

And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples ; and of them he chose twelve, whom he also named Apostles.

OUR Saviour, when he entered into his ministry, chose for companions and disciples men who seem to have been in the main of an honest, sober and inoffensive conversation ; men who if they had not been remarkably good, yet had not been notoriously profane and wicked.

He came indeed to call sinners to repentance, and he excluded no sincere penitents from the gracious privileges of his Gospel ; nor did he refuse to eat and drink with them, to direct, to instruct, and to comfort such persons. Yet to have taken very infamous men, though sincerely

reformed, for his ministers, his agents, his deputies, and his assistants, might have raised a just prejudice against him in the minds of the people, and have been no small hindrance to the progress of the Gospel. But amongst all the cavils thrown out by the Pharisees and Scribes at his conduct and doctrine, we find not that they charged him with employing scandalous and vicious Apostles.

He also chose men who as they were harmless and well-disposed, were likewise men of mean abilities and low stations, who had neither worldly wisdom, nor eloquence, nor wealth, nor interest, nor friends amongst the Great; and for this procedure two reasons may be assigned; first, that the power of God might the more eminently appear in establishing a pure and holy religion by instruments so mean, and in all appearance so utterly unqualified for the purpose. This is one reason, and it is expressly mentioned by St. Paul. Another reason was, to avoid giving any just offence to the Civil Government, and to convince the public that he was influenced by no temporal motives, and had no selfish ends to serve by the assistance of men who were few in number, and who could neither plead for him, nor fight for him,

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St. Paul indeed, who was afterwards called to the ministry, seems to have had the advantage of a liberal and learned education beyond the rest of the Apostles ; but we find that he was afflicted with some bodily infirmities, and some defect in elocution, which he calls a thorn in the flesh, and which he thought would be prejudicial to his office ; and therefore he besought the Lord that they might be removed. But it was revealed to him that the grace of Christ, and the spiritual gifts conferred upon him, should compensate those defects and imperfections, that he should be a successful preacher of the Gospel, and that the power of God should be made the more conspicuous by his weakness.

Our Saviour then first elected twelve disciples, whom he called Apostles ; and afterwards he chose and appointed seventy disciples ; and the office both of the Twelve and of the Seventy was to preach his Gospel, and to prepare the way before him, and to prove their mission by signs and wonders.

Though the establishment of the seventy disciples, as teachers, was posterior to that of the twelve Apostles, yet their commission expired

during the life of Christ, and before the Apostleship had received its full strength and perfection.

It may be observed that our Lord, in the appointment of the twelve Apostles, and of the seventy Disciples, followed an usage to which the Jewish nation in ancient times had been accustomed; for God had distinguished them into twelve Tribes, each of which once had its Head and its Leader; and had given them seventy * Elders to direct them. In allusion to this, Christ says to his Apostles, Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Jewish Synagogues used, it is said, to send forth some of their principal members to collect alms and tythes, and called them Apostles or Missionaries. And as these Apostles acted in the name of the Synagogue, they were invested with its authority. For this reason our Lord, giving a commission to his Apostles, says, He that receiveth or rejecteth you, receiveth or rejecteth me.

But the name of Apostle was not strictly and absolutely appropriated and confined to the

* Numb. xi. 16.

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Twelve Disciples, to whom our Lord gave this denomination ; since we find that Titus, Andronicus, Epaphroditus, and others, were also sometimes called Apostles ; and afterwards each Christian Church, City, or Nation called those persons Apostles, who had first preached and planted the Gospel amongst them.

Yet there is a wide difference between these Apostles and the Twelve. The Twelve, whom Christ first honoured with this name and office, were particularly appointed to bear witness to all that they had seen him do and heard him teach. So that if any man could be found as enlightened as any of the Apostles were, and as capable of instructing men, yet we could not give him this denomination, unless in an improper manner, except he had been also favoured with the privilege of seeing Jesus Christ, and of conversing with him, and being appointed by him. This was the case of St. Paul, who was a thirteenth Apostle, and who founds his claim to the Apostleship upon these prerogatives. Am I not an Apostle ? says he ; and have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord ?

The Apostles were then immediately chosen and sent by Jesus Christ. Hence it was that when it became necessary to substitute one in
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the place of Judas, the choice was referred to God, and the person appointed by casting lots. But when other Pastors and Deacons were to be created, the election was made by the suffrages of those whom it concerned.

Another character of the Apostles is, that they were Embassadors of Christ, and Embassadors of God, acting in the divine name and authority; a character which if applied to other ministers of the Gospel, must be taken in a lower and more limited sense.

Again; the Apostles, after the descent of the holy Spirit, received by inspiration the doctrines which they were to teach, and consequently were infallible in their decisions.

But we must not imagine that, even after Christ had given them the holy Spirit, they were ignorant of nothing. Though Christ had commissioned his Apostles to preach to all the world, yet St. Peter stood in need of an heavenly vision to teach him, that he ought to preach to Cornelius and to other Pagans, or Pagan proselytes. The Apostles after they received the Holy Ghost, consulted together with the brethren at Jerusalem, whether the converted Pagans were or were not obliged to observe the Ceremonial Law. Their illumination

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tion was gradual, and nothing hindered one of them from knowing more than another even in things spiritual. The Spirit, says Christ to them, shall lead you to all truth ; into all such knowledge as is absolutely necessary to enable you to exercise your Apostolical office. It is not to be supposed that this instruction in the truth was bestowed upon them in an instant, but successively, and by degrees, as the event itself, and the history of the Acts of the Apostles testify.

Nor again should we imagine that the Holy Ghost gave them spiritual knowledge without their own concurrence to acquire, and preserve and increase it, by meditating upon the Scriptures, and using all the means which were naturally in their power.

Nor again must we imagine that the holy Spirit made them infallible and faultless in their own private and personal conduct. St. Peter fell into a blameable dissimulation when he separated himself from the Gentile converts, to humour the prejudices of the Jewish Christians ; and St. Paul reprimanded him for it. St. John in the Revelation attempted to worship the Angel who shewed him those visions ; and the Angel forbid him. But then these and
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such like defects and errors did not invalidate their doctrine. Their doctrine was sealed and confirmed by the Holy Ghost, with signs and wonders, and miraculous gifts.

The inspiration of the Writers of the New Testament, is perhaps impossible to be accurately fixed by us; but such precision is not at all necessary, to establish the truth of Christianity, whatsoever degree of inspiration we fix upon, and though we should extend it no farther than to the prophetic parts of the New Testament. They who carry the notion of it very high, involve themselves in many difficulties; and they who set it very low, will find as many difficulties in reconciling it with the express promises made by Christ to his Apostles. The most probable supposition seems to be that the Writers of the Gospels and Epistles were so far under the direction of the holy Spirit, as to be secured from any mistakes in the essential and fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

Another privilege of the Apostles was the use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. This power was first promised by Jesus Christ to Peter; and it means a power to open the kingdom of heaven, or the Church of Christ,
to

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to such Jews and Gentiles as were qualified to be admitted.

I say unto thee that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church.

Here is an allusion to his name. Thy name is Peter, which signifies a rock, or a stone; and upon this rock I will build my Church; and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Suitably to this promise, St. Peter laid the first foundation of the Church amongst the Jews, on the day of Pentecost, and converted three thousand hearers; and he laid the foundation of the Church amongst the Gentiles, by converting Cornelius and his friends and family. In this sense also he had the keys of the kingdom of heaven committed to him, and he opened it by first introducing the Jews and the Gentiles.

This privilege of the keys, although it was not peculiar to Peter, but common to all the other Apostles with him, yet being first declared by his Master to belong to him, adds to the dignity of his character, and yet detracts nothing from the power of the other Apostles, upon whom also, as upon a rock and a solid foundation, the Church was built, as St. Paul assures

assures us. What office soever St. Peter exercised in the Church, the other Apostles, particularly James and John, exercised the same, and converted those of the Circumcision as well as he; and St. Paul was in a most eminent manner the Apostle of the Gentiles, and opened the kingdom of heaven to far more Gentiles than Peter ever did. He had then at least as great a share as the other in this divine gift.

The phrase of receiving the keys was well known to the Jews; for the prophet Isaiah promising to Eliakim that he should be superintendent of the royal palace, says that the key of the house of David should be committed to him. Moreover the Jews, it is said, when they made a man a Doctor of the Law, used to put into his hands the key of the closet in the temple, where the sacred books were repositied, and also tablets to write upon, to signify that they gave him authority to teach and to explain the Scriptures and the Law of God to the people.

Our Saviour, in like phrase, says of himself, in the Revelation; I have the keys of Death and of the Grave. I am he who hath the key of David; who openeth, and no man shutteth; and who shutteth, and no man openeth.

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Another prerogative conferred upon the Apostles was the power of binding and loosing. As the power of the keys respected persons fit or unfit to be admitted into the Church; so the power of binding and loosing related to things more directly than to persons; and to persons, by way of consequence. The expression of binding and loosing was well known to the Jews; it signified denying and forbidding, or declaring and allowing any act to be lawful or unlawful. This shews that Jesus Christ appointed the Apostles under himself as a sort of Legislators in the Church, or rather as declarers of his will, and expounders of the sense of his laws. Thus they forbade the Gentile converts to be circumcised, or to eat things offered to idols. On the contrary, they permitted St. Paul to take upon him the vow of a Nazarite, and to purify himself in the temple with some other brethren, which was done to avoid giving scandal and needless offences to the Jewish Believers.

The Apostles had also a power of remitting or retaining sins. By this power they offered pardon and reconciliation to the repenting Jews, though they had stained their hands in the blood of Jesus Christ.

When they retained the sins of an offender, they had a power also to deliver him to Satan, for the correction of the flesh, and to send sickness and diseases upon him, not as a vindictive punishment, but as a chastisement, to bring him to a better mind. These acts of severity they seem to have seldom exercised; and they exercised them without committing any error or excess, because the holy Spirit gave them on those occasions a knowledge of the disposition of men's hearts whom they thus judged and condemned. But now, in these ages, every sentence pronounced for or against a man by the Church and its Ministers, is conditional, the hearts of men being no longer known by men.

In the Apostolical days then, to deliver a person to Satan, was not only to put him under Ecclesiastical censure, but to put him under the power of an evil Spirit, to afflict him with bodily diseases. After the death of the Apostles, this latter power ceased.

It appears from some passages in the New Testament, where our Saviour forgave the sins of the sick, and ordered them to sin no more, that the divine Providence did sometimes inflict diseases upon offenders. This was a commonly

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received opinion amongst the Jews; and God had threatened them in the Law and in the Prophets, that he would send diseases amongst them, to punish their transgressions. It appears also from an Epistle of St. Paul, that the Corinthian Christians, having been guilty of some irregularities, were chastened by the Lord with distempers, and that many of them were weak and sickly, and many had been cut off by untimely death.

Another prerogative of the Apostles was, that they were not only endued with extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, but could communicate some of those gifts to others by the imposition of hands. Herein they surpassed the ancient Prophets. This privilege was so peculiar to the Apostles, that Philip, though a Deacon and an Evangelist, did not possess it, and it was necessary to send for Peter and John to communicate it to the baptized Samaritans by laying on of hands.

Yet it should be observed, that the Apostles had not power to exercise their miraculous gifts according to their own private inclinations and wishes, but by a particular impulse of the Spirit; else St. Paul would certainly have cured his beloved disciple Timothy, who was in a bad state of health. But instead of that,

in his first Epistle to him, he prescribes a medicine, which is a very common one, and by no means infallible.

Another Apostolical pre-eminence was the extraordinary effect of their preaching, which was presignified by the tongues of fire that descended upon them on the day of Pentecost. This efficacy was to be ascribed principally to the assistance of the divine Spirit, who, knowing the capacities and dispositions of the hearers, directed the Apostles to use such proofs and such motives, as would have the most influence upon their minds, and also enabled them to accompany their preaching with suitable signs and wonders.

Another Apostolical privilege was contained in these words, Go and teach all nations. The commission was confined to no place, but they had a right to preach wheresoever they found opportunity, where the holy Spirit led them, or prudential causes directed them. With a view to spread the Gospel more speedily and extensively, they departed some to one province, some to another; and St. Peter more particularly preached to the Jews, as St. Paul to the Gentiles. Thus the Apostleship seems to have been usually incompatible with the confined
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superintendency of only one particular Church, or district, and to have been superior to it.

The last character of the Apostles, by which they are discriminated from all other Ministers of the Gospel, is, that they had no successors, strictly and properly so called, none who entered into all their powers and privileges. Their office began and ended with them.

The extraordinary gifts of the holy Spirit seem to have ceased in a great measure soon after the death of the Apostles; at least we cannot trace them farther with any certainty and full satisfaction. And thus the Church having been founded and established by men divinely commissioned and miraculously supported, and by their companions and disciples, was afterwards under the conduct and ministry of Pastors and Teachers of human appointment, and hath been so from that time to this.

But the Pastoral Office itself is of divine appointment, and of absolute and perpetual necessity, as it appears both from Reason and from Revelation. It is impossible that Religion should be kept up, and religious society subsist, without some to teach, and others to be taught; some to guide, and others to be guided; and so, as to the distinction between Clergy and Laity,

the thing itself, whether the name be so or not, is as old as Christianity, and must last as long as Christianity.

And now let me offer, by way of inference from the subject, a few general directions to the Christian people, concerning their common duty, as it respects the support and the welfare of religion.

I. They ought to be thankful that Christianity is the established religion of the country, and that they have perpetual opportunity to serve God in public as well as in private. But then their gratitude can be better shewed no other way than by making a regular and conscientious use of this most valuable privilege. Charity itself, which hopeth all things, can entertain no favourable hopes of those who totally neglect this important part of worship. There are only three excuses that can be admitted; sickness, works of charity, and works of necessity. But in truth, it is a cold disregard of all religion, and an evil heart of unbelief, that usually lies at the bottom, and produces a lazy and scandalous contempt of the public assemblies of Christians, and thinks the time lost that is spent in honouring God, and setting a good example. It is to be feared that
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the time also is lost that is spent in exhorting such persons to behave themselves like rational creatures and servants of Christ.

2. All men have an inherent right to judge for themselves in matters of religion. The Gospel is a system founded upon sufficient evidence, and an appeal to the sense and reason of mankind. In many countries professing Christianity, the people are deprived of this natural privilege; and a blind submission, with an implicit faith in the Church, is required of them. But, thanks to the Divine Providence, we are not under this bondage. The Scripture is put into our hands as our only sacred and infallible guide; and we are to consider whether the doctrines and duties propounded to us by our Teachers, or by any other persons, are consonant to reason, and to the word of God. False Teachers there always were, and always will be; and every Christian ought to be upon his guard against them.

But let me add, that the Laity should exercise this freedom of judgment with sober consideration and discretion, especially in this country. So that the Apostle's caution may be applied to this occasion: Brethren, ye are

called unto liberty ; only use not your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness and licentiousness.

For in this nation the regular Clergy are usually prepared for the ministry by a learned education, and have leisure to apply themselves to the studies relating to their spiritual function ; and it may be affirmed, without the least deviation from truth, that no nation hath produced better discourses on religious and moral subjects, and better expositions of the Scriptures, than those which our Ancestors have left us since the days of the Reformation. Upon the Gospel and upon these models our Sermons are usually formed ; so that the Laity have the less reason to fear that any thing should be publicly taught them that is contrary to the essentials of Christianity ; and if any thing of that kind were attempted, it would soon be made matter of public complaint. Therefore the common people, they especially who are not learned, ought in decency and modesty to suppose that their Teachers are usually better skilled than themselves, and should never slight and censure them without the most apparent reason.

3. It is also the duty of the people to be contented with their own publicly appointed Pastors,

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tors, and to adhere to them. This duty is disregarded by persons, who perhaps mean well, but are of such a capacity and disposition that reasons can have a small effect upon them. To themselves they must be left. Time and experience may possibly cure them; or fickleness and the love of variety and novelty may bring them back to their forsaken Churches.

4. Though the public administration of God's Word and Sacraments is justly confined by our Church to the Ministers of the Gospel appointed for that purpose, yet Christians ought to know and to remember, that in a certain sense they are all of them Ministers of the Gospel, and Stewards of the gifts which God hath bestowed upon them for mutual edification. Every one whose age, whose religious knowledge, whose abilities, whose rank, whose natural and civil rights, whose power and influence have set him above some others, who hath a family, children, servants, dependents, should endeavour, as far as he is able, to make them good Christians, as well as useful members of society; and ought also himself willingly and thankfully to receive any good advice and instruction which may be offered to him by others.

This doctrine of the brotherly kindness, mutual assistance, and spiritual intercourse which ought to be found amongst Christians, is frequently and manifestly taught us in the New Testament.

5. Lastly; It is the duty of all Christian people, to the utmost of their power, to encourage and promote Christian charity, and all acts of charity, and those especially which tend to the advancement of piety. Such are, educating the poor and the young, employing the idle, reclaiming the vicious, instructing the ignorant, and converting those who sit in darkness, and the shadow of death.

Though we have great reason to be humble before God, and not to exalt ourselves above other people, yet we hope it may be said of us, that we are not inferior to any nation, with respect to public charities. May we never be weary of thus well doing; may the same compassionate Spirit ever remain among us, and may we consider it as one of the most effectual means to avert God's displeasure, and to secure his protection, and the continuance of our liberties and of our religion. What the son of Sirach says of individuals, holds true of communities.

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munities. He says, Shut up alms in thy store-houses, and they shall deliver thee from affliction : they shall fight for thee against thine enemies better than a mighty shield, and a strong spear.

SERMON

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munities. He says, Shut up arms in thy store-
houses, and they shall deliver thee from affliction:
they shall fight for thee against thine
enemies better than a mighty shield, and a

strong spear.
I have said, I will not make war, neither will I
build bulwarks: for I have trusted in the Lord my
Saviour, and he will deliver me from all mine
enemies. I have said, I will not make war, neither
will I build bulwarks: for I have trusted in the
Lord my Saviour, and he will deliver me from all
mine enemies. I have said, I will not make war,
neither will I build bulwarks: for I have trusted
in the Lord my Saviour, and he will deliver me
from all mine enemies.

Though we have seen the Lord our Saviour,
and he will deliver us from all our enemies,
yet we must not forget that we are still in the
world, and we must still be subject to the
law of God. We must still be subject to the
law of God, and we must still be subject to the
law of God. We must still be subject to the
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S E R M O N XIX.

MATTH. xxiii. 9.

Call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

THESE words have an appearance of difficulty, arising merely from the manner of expression; but the difficulty is so small, that Commentators are agreed in fixing the sense of the place, which is this; Where it is evident that God teaches and requires one thing, and man another, hearken to God, and not to man. Be not over-ruled by the authority of natural and earthly fathers, nor of spiritual fathers, that is, of pastors and teachers, nor of political fathers, that is, of rulers and magistrates. They are all to be obeyed, but with this exception, that they require nothing contrary to the will of God. In such cases, Call no man father upon earth, says our Lord, for one is your Father who is in heaven; and call no

man master, for one is your Master, even Christ.

The reasons for which our Saviour gave this caution are evident.

First, when the Gospel began to be preached, men who were convinced of its truth, and inclined to receive it, were often in danger of incurring the displeasure of their nearest relations and dearest friends, of father and mother, as also of the rulers in Church and State.

This our Saviour sets forth in very strong expressions, declaring that his doctrine, through the prejudices and the vices of men, would be the innocent cause and occasion of violent contentions and persecutions. Think not, says he, that I am come to send peace upon earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.

Secondly, the Jews at that time were accustomed to pay a blind and slavish deference to their

their spiritual Fathers, their Doctors and wise men, and to prefer their authority even to that of their Prophets, and of their own sacred books. This sordid and implicit faith is attended with the worst of consequences, and when artful and ambitious and dishonest Guides have such an ascendant over the populace, there is no absurdity and no villainy which the latter may not be induced to practise; as it signally appeared in the behaviour of the Jews towards Christ and towards his Apostles.

Thirdly, our Saviour foresaw that the same corruption would enter into his Church, and the same slavish obedience to the traditions and doctrines of men; that Fathers, and Monks, and Councils, and Synods, and Prelates, and Popes would at last so engross all power both spiritual and temporal, and abuse it to such an enormous degree, that scarcely the shadow of Christianity would remain in the Christian world. Upon these accounts our Saviour thought it needful to remind his followers that their heavenly Father was their nearest relation, their truest guide, and their best friend, the only Father whose authority admitted no bounds, and obedience to whom could not be carried too far.

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And yet there is a duty and a submission, even in matters of religion and in things spiritual, to men, to parents, to lawful teachers, and to magistrates; the bounds and measures of which deserve to be stated and considered.

When we are required to obey God rather than man, and to call no man father upon earth, it is supposed, that we are of years of discretion, and of a capacity to distinguish the will of God from the will of man; and consequently such precepts extend not to children.

The nature of things is the will of God; and the divine Providence manifestly intended to permit that children should be placed under the care and government of their own parents, in things spiritual as well as temporal; whence it follows, that usually they will be, and indeed that they ought to be, of the religion of their parents, till they are of years and of capacity sufficient to enable them to choose for themselves. Such is the order and the natural state and course of things. It is impossible for children to discern which religious sect or system is the best; and if theirs happens not to be the best, that is no fault of theirs.

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It is therefore an act of iniquity and oppression for any government, or for any Church, or Sect, to take away children from their parents by force or by fraud, under the plea and pretence that the religion of the parents is faulty. It is depriving the parents of that right over their offspring which divine Providence hath committed to them. Yet this scandalous tyranny hath been too frequently practised in the Christian world, under the mask of zeal and piety.

The Jews, for example, from the destruction of their country, and their dispersion over the world, have frequently been exposed to this inhuman treatment, as they have been to oppression and persecution of every kind. Their children have been torn away from them, and educated in another religion. The same iniquity hath been practised by the Papists, who have persecuted the Protestants, and have seduced their children by artifice, or taken them by violence, and made them converts to the Church of Rome. Examples of this may still be found, and will be found, as long as false zeal, and false politics shall prevail.

The same disingenuous and dishonest methods have been also ever practised by those Secretaries,

taries, who upon no just grounds have made divisions, and set up new ways of worship. Though they have often been so cramped and curbed by national laws and civil governments that they could not have recourse to violence, yet they have used every artifice to seduce the young, the ignorant and the unstable from those who had a right to the care and guidance of them.

It is a vain attempt to convince bigots of the iniquity of such methods. They are so far from accounting it a fault, that they think it a pious and meritorious act to save the souls of young persons from everlasting destruction by bringing them over to true religion. If false and blind zeal did not extinguish every moral principle and sentiment, they might see that man should not pretend to be wiser than God, nor to break those connections of parent and child which his providence hath appointed, nor to imagine that young persons can judge for themselves in religious points, at a time when they cannot judge of the smallest temporal concern, nor to do evil that good may come of it, nor to think that a godly end can sanctify ungodly means.

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And as to open oppression, shall men presume to compel, when God himself compels not? God only persuades; and religion is a voluntary and a rational service. Truth scorns artifice, and abhors violence; and these are the refuge of men whose religion is either mere worldly policy, or enthusiastic superstition.

Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets. There is no man that hath a religion of his own, and is sincere in the profession of it, who would not think himself cruelly used by one who should decoy his children away from him, or seize upon them by violence, and educate them in other principles. Why then will he practise himself what he detests in another? He will reply, Because my opinions are right, and his are wrong; I am orthodox, and he is an heretic or an infidel, and is training up his young family to damnation. Wretched argument! which will establish universal and everlasting persecution, exercised by the majority upon the weaker party, since every one's religion is right in his own eyes.

I know of only one exception which can be made to this Paternal right of education; and

that is, if the parents should be so poor, so lazy, and so profligate, as to take no care at all of their children, but either leave them to starve, or turn them out to beg and to steal, In this case the children seem to become the children of the Public, and the civil magistrate acquires a right to take them to himself, and to give them maintenance and instruction in the religion of the country, though it should not be the religion of the parents.

Again : There are persons in the world who must live and die children, in the moral sense ; I mean those, who having very low abilities, and a necessity to earn their bread by continual labour, are not at all in a condition to examine the pretensions of different sects, and to prefer one to another upon a judgment properly formed. It seems to be the duty of such persons, and the wisest course which they can take, to be of the religion of their own country, and to follow the instructions of their own publicly appointed teachers.

But are we not exhorted in the Scriptures to search, to judge, to examine, and to determine for ourselves, and in all matters of religion to obey God rather than man, and, as the Text says, to call no man father upon earth ?

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This is very true ; but then it is no less true that these directions are given to those who are capable of putting them in practice ; and so far as they are of general obligation, they must relate to such points as are obvious to the young and to the old, to the small and to the great, to the unlearned and to the learned, to the weak and to the wise, to the ignorant and to the skilful. Now the question is, What points are these?

They may , I think, be reduced to three : first to a belief in God, in opposition to atheism ; secondly to the moral virtues, in opposition to vice and debauchery ; and thirdly, in Christian countries, to Christianity, in opposition to infidelity.

First, then, To believe in Almighty God, maker and governor of the world, to whom we are accountable for our behaviour, this is a duty which very soon becomes clear and obvious even to a mean capacity ; and nothing can be urged in favour of atheism that should incline us to neglect it. There is this glaring folly and absurdity in atheism, that if it were true doctrine, it would be a most mischievous truth, releasing men from all ties of conscience, and letting them loose upon one another as so many beasts

of prey. On the contrary, nothing is risked, and nothing is lost, by believing in God, and much good is obtained by it both for individuals and for society ; so that if it were an error, it would be a profitable and a commendable error ; and therefore it cannot be an error.

Secondly, As to the moral duties, they are so adapted to human nature, that they enter into the understanding as easily as light into the eye, and sounds into the ear. Very little skill is requisite to perceive that lying, and cheating, and robbing, and bearing false witness, and ingratitude to parents and friends, and drunkenness, and laziness, and adultery, and murder, and such like practices, are evil ; and that civility, and modesty, and temperance, and industry, and honesty, and charity, and every other virtue, are good, and right, and fit. Indeed no one can be seduced to vice by being attacked with serious arguments, but by having temptations thrown in his way ; no one can be debauched by reason, but by passion ; and Solomon's direction may be felt even by an ignorant person, or by a child : My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not ; for they lay wait for their own blood, they lurk privily for their own lives.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, As to Christianity, in opposition to infidelity, we may say of it what we said of the points before mentioned, that its truth is evident and acceptable to every well-disposed mind, and that there are no proper inducements to forsake it, where it is fairly taught and explained. If the moral virtues are good, the Christian religion must needs be good; for the sum and substance of it, as to practice, is morality, or natural religion. There is no virtue which it doth not recommend, and no vice which it doth not condemn. Our Saviour and his Apostles, so mild and so gentle on other occasions, used the severest expressions concerning those who then rejected the Gospel, and imputed that rejection of it to their vices, because it was confirmed by undeniable signs, and wonders, and predictions; and because it was in its main and moral part, so reasonable and so profitable.

These are the three great duties which concern all persons, who have a capacity to understand them; and a moderate capacity is sufficient for that purpose. As to those who are blessed with leisure, with good abilities, and with opportunities for exerting them, they are obliged to acquaint themselves more

accurately with the will of God, to search, to enquire, to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good. It is a shame, and a folly, and a crime, for persons who are skilled in arts and sciences, in human learning, and in things pertaining to the present life, to be so careless and so ignorant in matters of religion as they are too often found to be.

This may suffice concerning the first part of the text, Call no man your father upon earth. I proceed to the second part, One is your Father who is in heaven.

Amongst the titles and characters given to the Almighty, is that of Universal Father, which hath been ascribed to him not only by the writers of the Old and New Testament, but by the general and ancient consent of all civilized nations. Christianity, indeed, hath enabled us to see more distinctly than the Gentiles or the Jews the several accounts on which God is our Father.

We are his children*, as we are his creatures, made, preserved, and maintained by him; as we are intellectual creatures, formed in his image; as by the practice of virtue and good-

* Barrow.

ness we still more resemble him, and enjoy his particular favour ; as we are Christians, adopted into his heavenly family, renewed by his assistance, acknowledged as brethren by his only-begotten Son, and designed to inherit eternal life.

The returns therefore which are due from us, as from children, to our heavenly Father, are these: absolute obedience and submission, cheerful compliance, imitation, trust and confidence, resignation and contentment, and a love of our fellow-creatures.

The word Father, implies in it dominion and authority, claiming obedience and subjection from the children. From the extensive nature of paternal right among men, we may judge of the authority which God hath over us, as he is our Father ; and of the obedience which, as children, we must yield to him. Children ought to be entirely guided by their parents whilst they are young and incapable of judging and acting for themselves. When they grow up to manhood, though love and honour remain indispensable duties, the paternal authority is not so great as it was ; but with relation to God, we are ever young and

in a state of minority, and the disposition of children is required of us.

As God is our Father, a willing compliance and a cheerful obedience are due to him. Fatherly dominion, as it is the most ancient and natural, so it is certainly the most gentle, of all governments; and parents are usually more apt to err on the side of indulgence than of severity.

God is a Father to us, in every sense of the word, bestowing upon us more than we could hope or expect, forgiving us our offences, ruling us with lenity, making allowances for human infirmities, temptations, surprises, mistakes, and errors; for every thing that can claim compassion, and is not deliberate and stubborn. He loves us better than any parent ever loved any child. Thus the Scriptures speak of him, and, condescending to our apprehensions, clothe him with paternal kindness, or weakness, which shall we call it? represent him loth to correct, and much distressed when he is compelled to it; and then soon relenting, and appeased, and disarmed by the first tokens of a sincere repentance.

The consideration that God is our Father, should lead us to imitate and resemble him.

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It should raise in us a just regard for ourselves, an innocent and an honest pride; it should inspire noble thoughts, and produce in us generous inclinations; withdraw us from mean, base, and unworthy designs and actions, and excite us to undertakings suitable to the dignity of our nature, and the nobility of our descent.

The relation of father and son supposes some likeness; and the son who values and respects his father, will walk in his steps, will be ashamed to degenerate, and to inherit his name and fortunes without his virtues. If ye were Abraham's children, says our Lord to the Jews, ye would do the works of Abraham: but ye are of your father the Devil, because ye perform the lusts of your father. So, if we be the sons of God, we must, as St. Paul exhorts, imitate God, as dear children. The Scripture frequently reminds us of this duty, both in general and in particulars. God is holy and pure; such ought we to be: As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, that ye may be the sons of God. God is good; in this we should resemble him: Be ye perfect, as your Father is perfect. God is bountiful, gracious, merciful, and long-suffering; thence we should learn to be kind
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to all, even to our enemies, that we may be the children of our Father who is in heaven. And our own reason will tell us that long depravity of heart, and habitual wickedness, must destroy in a great measure this relation between God and us. If sensual objects engross all our thoughts and time, if our better part be sunk in brutish pleasures, how can we be the children of Him who is pure and spiritual? If we be fierce and contentious, malicious and unrelenting, cruel and uncharitable, in what sense can we belong to Him who is essential Love, and over-flowing Benevolence? Can he acknowledge us for his, when Sin hath defaced the fair image, and not one token remains by which he can know us?

The consideration that God is our Father, teacheth us that it is our duty to place our trust and confidence in him. We call this a duty, and so it is; yet ought it rather to be considered as our privilege; and a great favour it is, that we are permitted to cast all our burden and care upon God, to rely on his providence, and to be solicitous about nothing that concerns our sustenance. Children, especially they who have wealthy and kind parents, live altogether free from care concerning their maintenance, void

void of all doubt and distrust. Such ought to be the state of our minds, since we have a Father so good and great, who, large as his family is, hath wealth enough for all his children; who is void of prejudice and partiality; and to whom we may have recourse upon all occasions. What man is there, who, if his son ask him bread, will give him a stone? or, if he ask fish, will give him a serpent? If we then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him?—Thus our Saviour, with a convincing force of argument, excites us to draw near to our Father, not with the abject fear and extorted submission of slaves, nor with the diffident shyness of strangers, nor with the doubts and suspicions of half-reconciled enemies, but with a filial temper, with respectful love, and a modest and humble confidence.

To this hope and reliance are to be added contentment and resignation: contentment in a low or inconvenient, and resignation in a suffering state.

To our Father and Master it belongs of right to order his own family according to his own discretion; to assign a proper station, and to

allot a proper portion, to each child : and much better it is for us that he should exercise this authority, than that we should serve ourselves, and be left to our own childish option. It is impossible that he should willingly or unwillingly hurt us, or detain from us any thing profitable.

Lastly, If God be the Father of all beings, they are all in some sort related to us, and so may claim from us a due affection and regard, according to their respective natures, dispositions, capacities, behaviour, and deserts.

As we are all members of one great family, we are obliged to universal benevolence. Even the least of God's creatures is not to be oppressed, the lowest brute is not to be misused by us, since even that is the work of God's hands, the subject of his care, and the object of his providence.

We are taught by our Saviour, when we pray to God, to say each of us, Our Father, not My Father, to remind us of our brethren, as well as of our Father ; and he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love his Father whom he hath not seen ? Respectful thoughts are due from us to the holy Angels, who are sent forth to minister to us,

us, though unseen, and to do us good offices; a grateful remembrance is due to those excellent persons departed hence, whose virtues are immortal, whose example incites to emulation, and with whom we hope to converse hereafter; benevolence is due to all mankind, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Christians are in a more eminent manner styled, The Brethren; and that charity, which in respect to others may be called humanity, with regard to them is called brotherly affection.

These are the principal uses arising from the doctrine, that One is our Father who is in heaven.

END OF VOL. IV.

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